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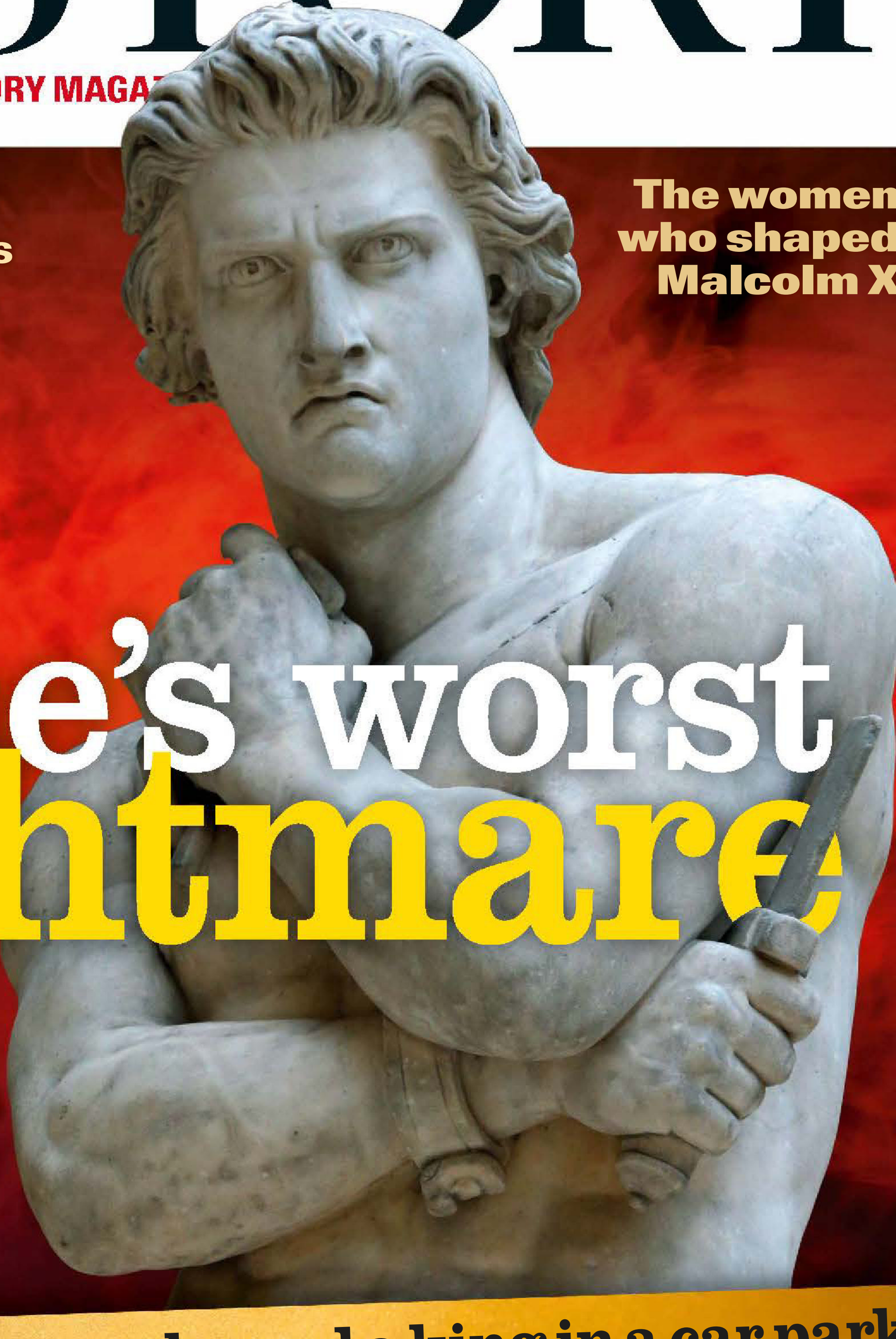
TUDORS IN TURMOIL

How religious strife rocked Henry VIII's England

HISTORY

25 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGA
June 2025 / **www.historyextra.com**



Victorian Britain's fearless female felons

Warriors, rulers, icons of resistance

The queens who transformed Africa's history

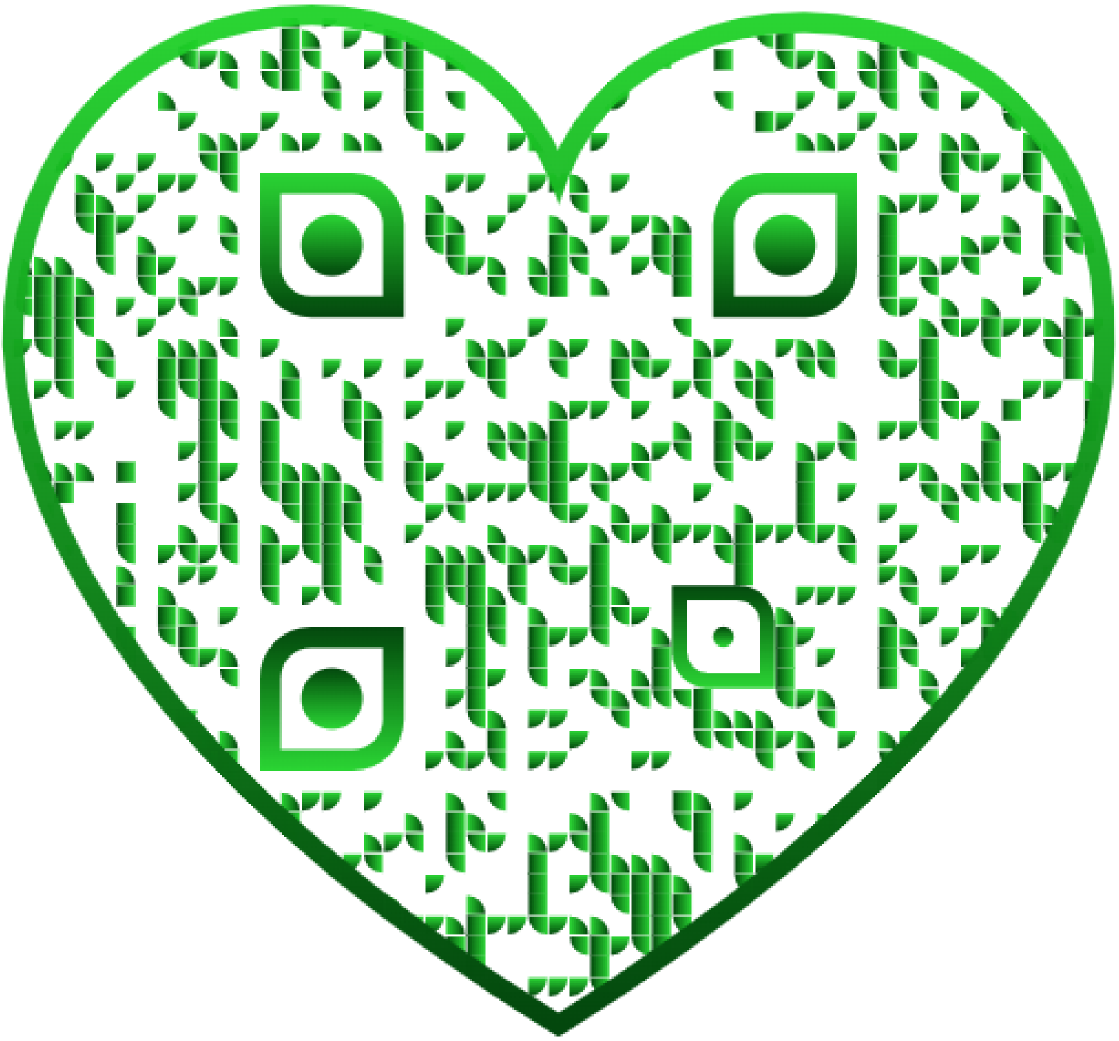
The women who shaped Malcolm X

Rome's worst nightmare

How **Spartacus** shattered the empire's aura of invincibility

Stonehenge, shipwrecks and a king in a car park

The greatest historical revelations of the past 25 years, by **Bettany Hughes, Michael Wood, Peter Frankopan** and more



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WELCOME JUNE 2025

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

"It was 25 years ago that the Tate Modern opened, *Gladiator* stormed the box office, Chelsea won the FA Cup – and we published our first ever issue. A lot has changed in the world since then, of course, as well as here at the magazine where we're now fully embedded in the digital media world. But, a quarter of a century on, we still have the same aim: to present the latest history research and ideas in an accessible and entertaining manner. And we're also still entirely beholden to you, our readers, without whom this entire enterprise would be somewhat pointless.

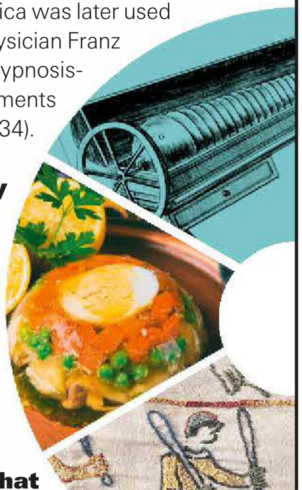
To mark **our 25th anniversary**, we reached out to 25 of our favourite historians to pick what they consider to be the key historical discoveries and insights of the 21st century (page 51). From astonishing archaeological finds to major reappraisals of key figures, it's a fascinating compendium – and we'd love to hear your suggestions of topics that should have made the list. Plus, on page 14, we've selected some of **our favourite *BBC History Magazine* covers of the past 25 years**. Again, do let us know which ones you most enjoyed – or disliked!

As always, there's plenty more to get your teeth into this month. From **Spartacus's rebellion** to **Victorian felons** and **the women who inspired Malcolm X**, I hope you'll find plenty to pique your interest in the pages that follow.

Whether this is your first issue or you've been with us since the start, I'd like to thank you all for reading the magazine and sharing your journey into the past with us. Here's to the next 25 years!

Rob Attar
Editor

THREE THINGS I'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH



1. Fascinated by Franklin

In this month's *Q&A* section, I was intrigued to learn that Benjamin Franklin's famed glass armonica was later used by German physician Franz Mesmer in his hypnosis-like treatments (page 34).

2. Savoury bravery

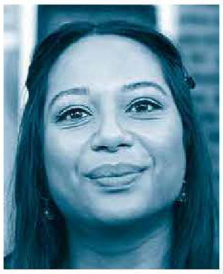
No childhood party was complete without a bright red, wobbly jelly – but I think I'd have drawn the line at chicken, fish or salad-cream jellies, which I learn were all the rage in the 1970s (*History Cookbook*, page 85).

3. Is that what I think it is?

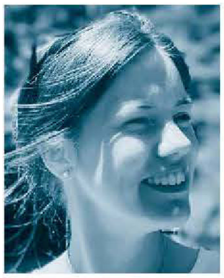
Our biggest online story this month reveals that an extra penis has been located on the Bayeux Tapestry – on top of the 93 appendages already known to be on there. Head to *historyextra.com* for all the details.

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Tracy Borman
"It was fascinating to explore the hidden meanings within Hans Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*, which is like a freeze-frame on one of the Tudor era's most turbulent years."
Tracy delves into the symbolic brilliance of the 16th-century masterwork on page 46



Shalina Patel
"Having relished teaching about Sophia Duleep Singh, I pondered a key question: which other hidden figures could I unearth who might connect with history topics I was already teaching my students?"
Shalina reveals how teachers make history relevant to today's students on page 11



Susannah Lyon-Whaley
"If 17th-century women didn't see foreign shores, they saw their blooms, and may have experienced the expanding world through the exotic plants in their gardens, art, craft and kitchens."
Susannah tells the story of how plants expanded women's horizons on page 64

Paula Akpan
"Some of these women are celebrated today as symbols of strength and inspiration, while others have been pushed to the margins of collective memory."
Paula discusses Africa's complex, powerful female leaders on page 70

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ON THE COVER: STATUE OF SPARTACUS BY DENIS FOYATIER, 1830, IN THE COUR MARLY SCULPTURE ROOM, LOUVRE MUSEUM: GETTY IMAGES. BACKGROUND: DREAMSTIME. HENRY VIII: GETTY IMAGES. THIS PAGE: DAMIAN MCFADDEN/BARNEY JONES/ALAMY/SHUTTERSTOCK/ ©BAYEUX TAPESTRY MUSEUM

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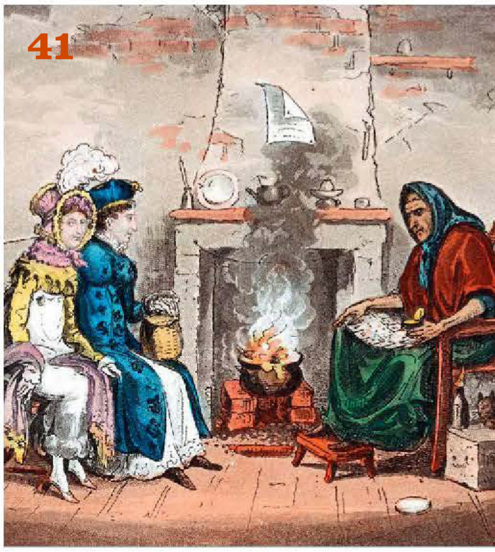

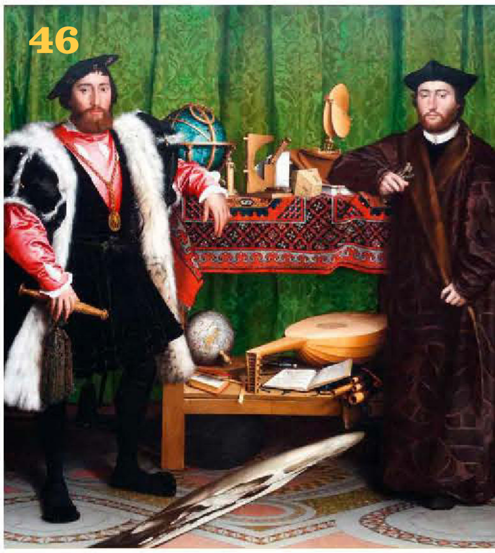

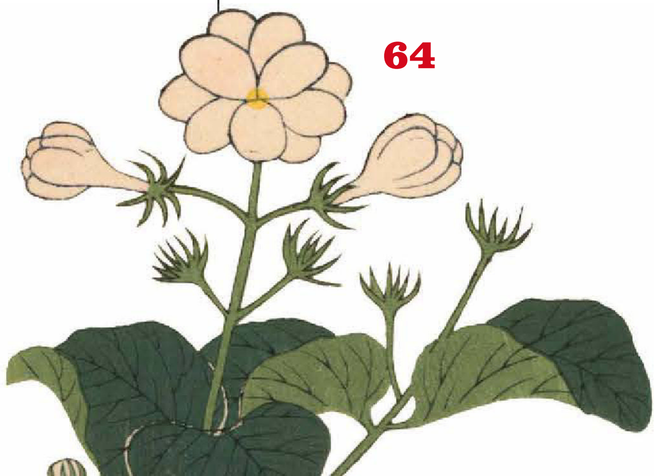

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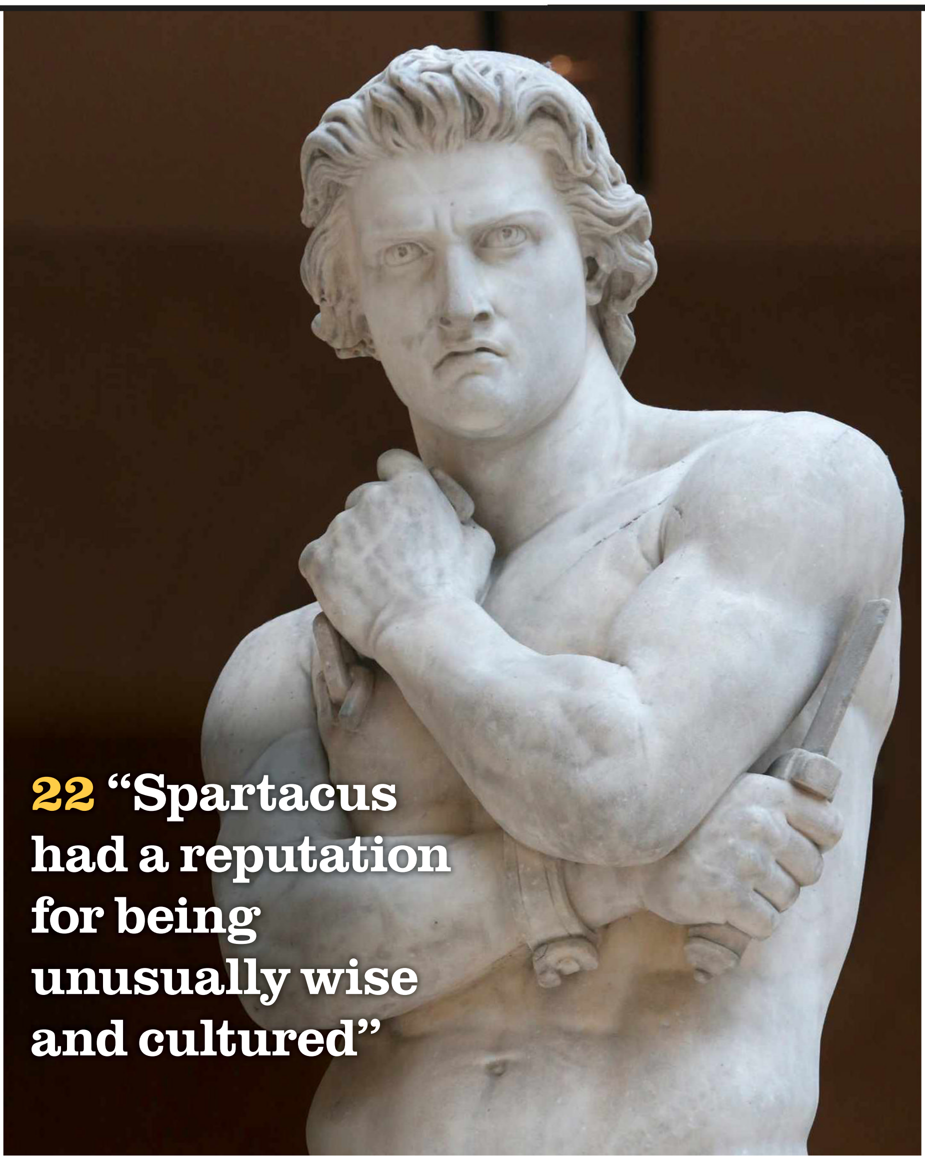
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25 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

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ANNIVERSARIES

DANNY BIRD highlights events that took place in June in history

20 JUNE AD 451

Attila the Hun meets his match

A Roman-led coalition thwarts the warlord's conquest of western Europe

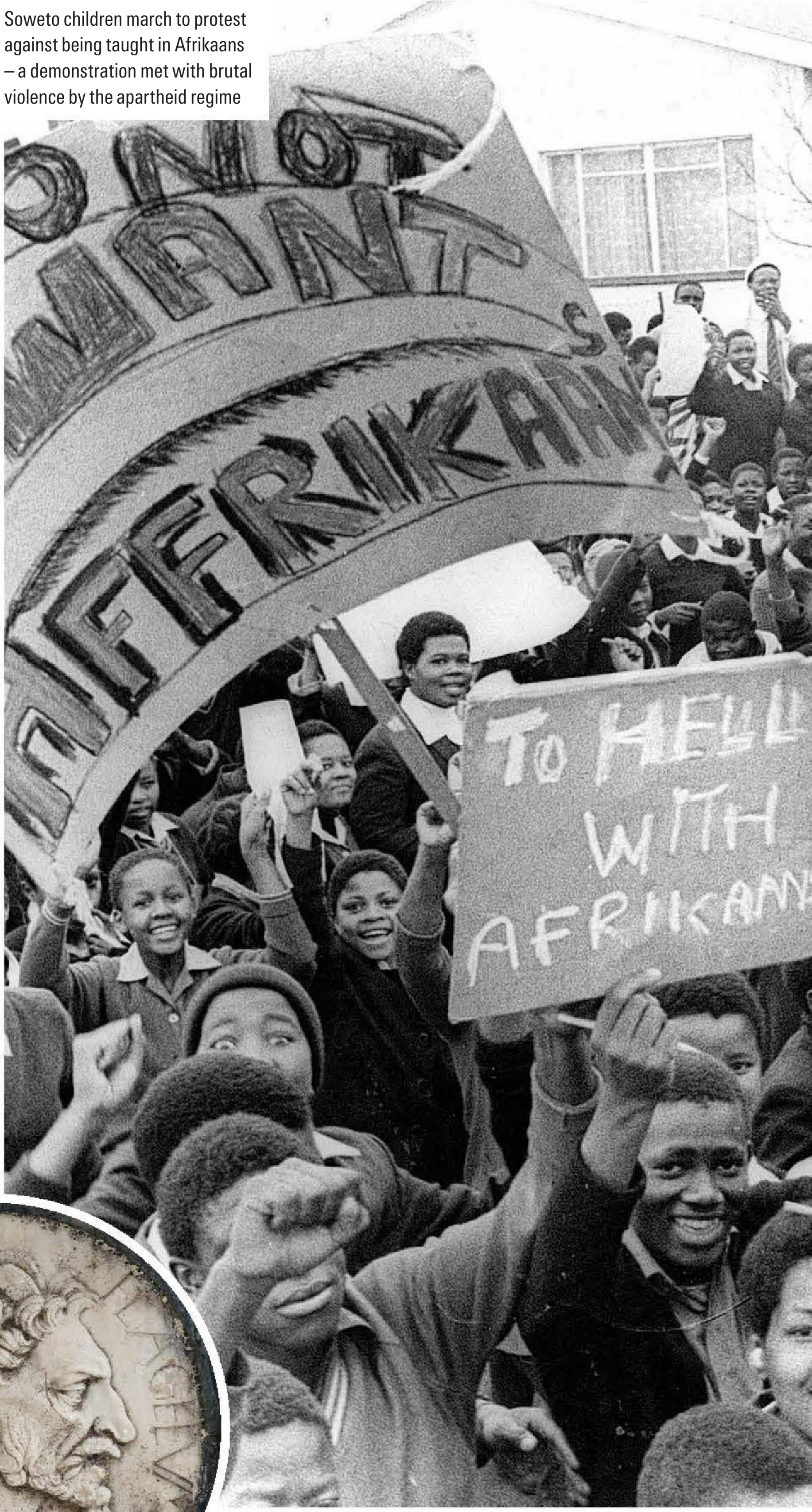
The sun blazed down on the Catalaunian Plains as dust clouds swirled, churned by the feet of tens of thousands of men. Spears bristled like a forest of iron as two mighty forces collided: the Huns under Attila, and a desperate alliance of Romans and Visigoths led by a seasoned Roman general, Flavius Aetius.

Chaos reigned as war cries split the air and the thunder of hooves rumbled across the battlefield. The Huns, fearsome and fast, surged forward. Attila surveyed the unfolding maelstrom from his encampment. He had ravaged Europe, burning its cities. But today, the armies of the continent pushed back.

The battle likely unfolded near modern-day Châlons-en-Champagne in north-eastern France, although historians still dispute the exact site. Here, the Roman empire in the west – politically fractured and militarily weakened – made a last stand. Aetius, once a hostage of the Huns and now Rome's last great general, commanded a patchwork force: Roman legions, Alans under King Sangiban, and the Visigoths, led by King Theodoric I and his son, Thorismund.

The Roman line held, though barely. Theodoric fell in battle, possibly trampled by horses, yet his warriors, driven by grief, struck with fury. Thorismund stormed the Hunnic flank. The field turned red. Inch by brutal inch, the allies pushed the Huns back. As night fell, Attila, unbroken but in retreat, withdrew behind a barricade of wagons. He did not advance again into Gaul.

A year later, Attila invaded Italy, but famine, plague and papal diplomacy turned him back. The following year, the most fearsome warrior of the age died at his wedding feast, seemingly from something as innocent as a nosebleed.



Soweto children march to protest against being taught in Afrikaans – a demonstration met with brutal violence by the apartheid regime

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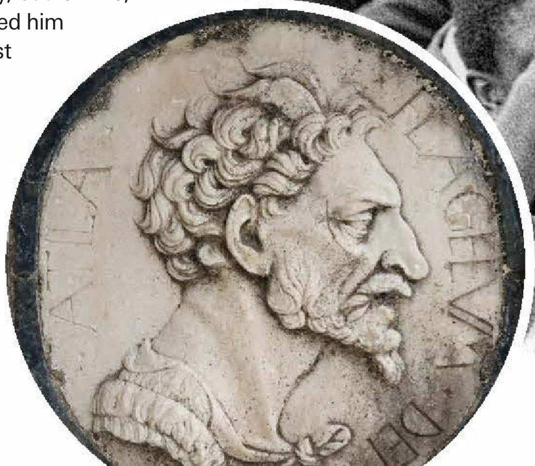
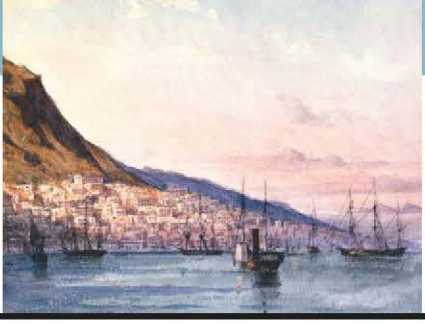


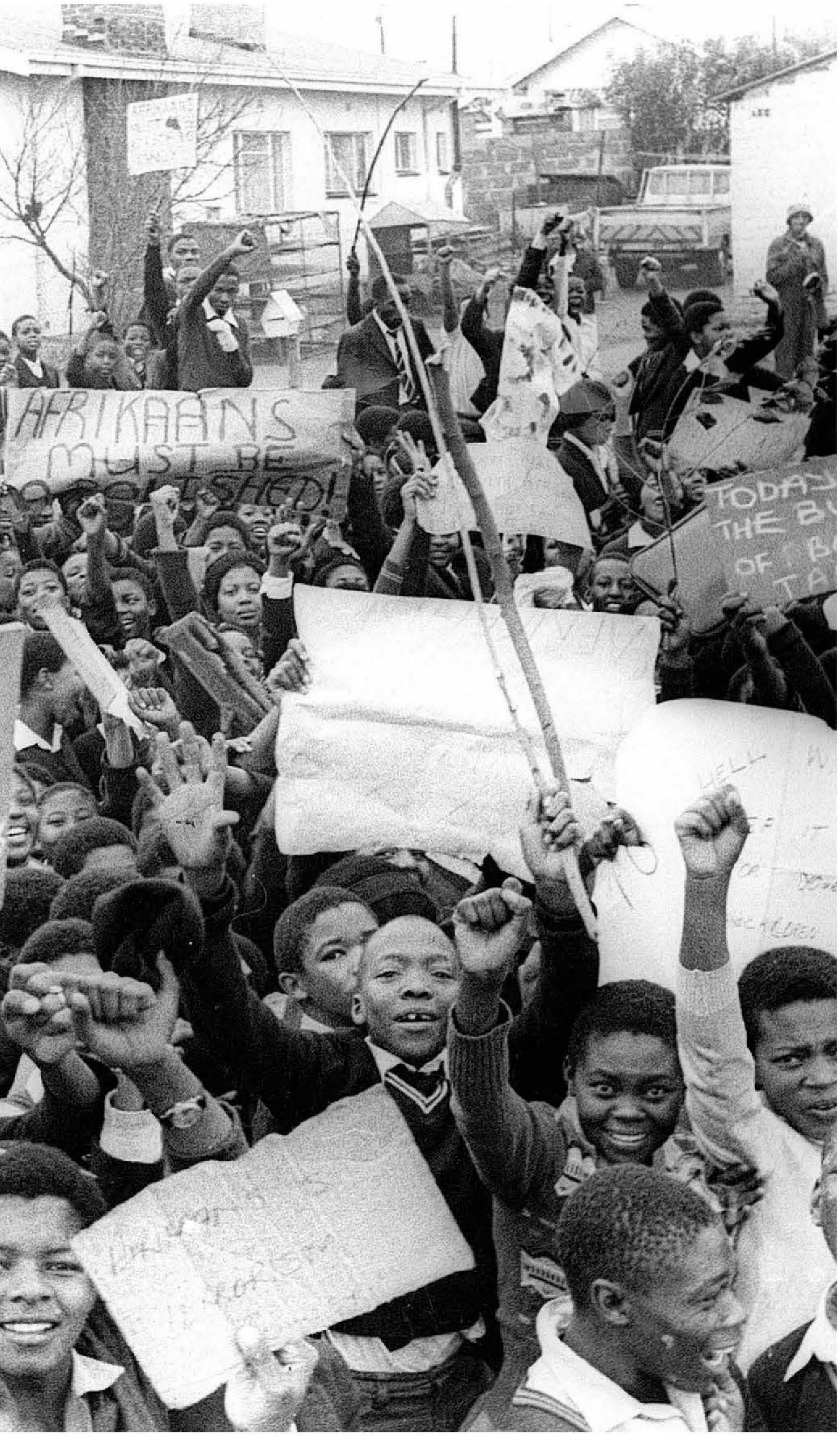
A Renaissance-era bas-relief representation of Attila the Hun (c406–53)



Hong Kong's harbour, 1865. The territory held huge strategic importance for the British in the colonial era

9 JUNE 1898

Britain and China sign the Second Convention of Peking, **leasing Hong Kong's New Territories for 99 years to London's control.** This strategic move expands colonial control, deepening Britain's imperial influence in Asia.



16 JUNE 1976

Soweto students rise against apartheid

Demonstrations against racist measures turn deadly in South Africa

On 16 June 1976, Soweto erupted. What began as a peaceful protest against the apartheid regime's imposition of the Afrikaans language in schools for black students, soon spiralled into a violent confrontation. Around 10,000 students – marching to chants such as "To hell with Afrikaans!" – took to the streets, voices rising in defiance.

Some marched in solidarity with those directly affected by the new policy, while others simply joined when they learned of the protest. The students' goal was clear: they intended to reach Soweto's Orlando Stadium for a rally and then the Department of Bantu Education, where they would present their demands for fair schooling.

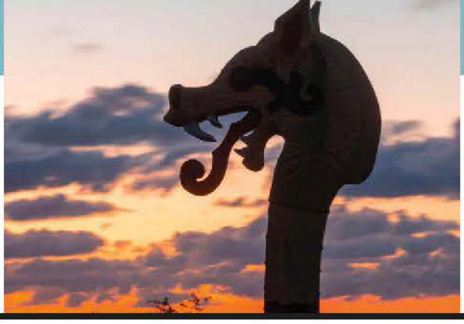
But as they reached Vilakazi Street, they were confronted by a wall of police officers. Tensions quickly escalated. The police, armed with tear gas, attempted to disperse the crowd, but the students responded by hurling stones. The situation intensified when the police unleashed dogs on the students. In a flash, the officers opened fire. Among the first victims were 12-year-old Hector Pieterson and 15-year-old Hastings Ndlovu, who fell to the ground, their deaths enraging the crowd.

Chaos ensued. As word of the bloodshed spread, violence exploded across Soweto, with looting and fires sweeping through the township. The government responded with even more force, deploying paramilitary units and ordering police to shoot to kill. Hospitals were flooded with the wounded, but an official directive forcing doctors to report any bullet injuries to the police created a climate of fear about recrimination.

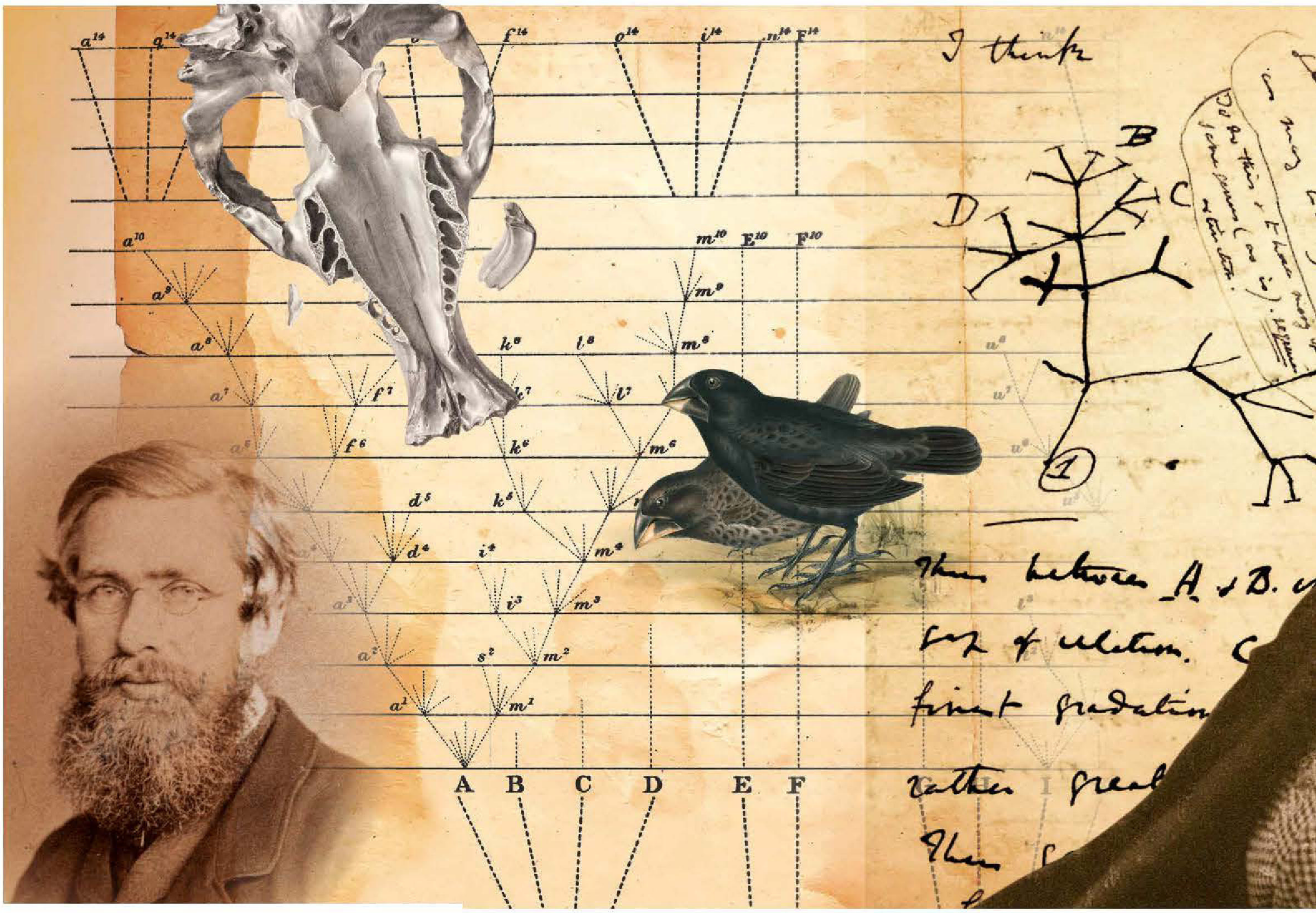
By the end of the uprising, at least 575 people were dead, although many believe the true toll was much higher. International outrage followed, as harrowing images of children fleeing police brutality were broadcast around the world. The Soweto uprising shook the foundations of apartheid, igniting a movement that would lead to the regime's downfall in the 1990s. Today, 16 June is a holiday in South Africa, commemorating the young people who resisted the injustice of racial segregation.

8 JUNE AD 793

Viking longships strike the Christian monastery at Lindisfarne. This savage raid, which sent shockwaves through Europe, is often cited as the beginning of the Viking Age in Britain.



Viking attacks on England initially involved groups of raiders, but later the Danes became settlers



18 JUNE 1858

Charles Darwin receives a shock in the mail

The naturalist is prompted to go public with his theory

Charles Darwin sat in his study at Down House in Kent, his mind steeped in the quiet labour of scientific endeavour. He was in no rush. For 20 years, he had patiently compiled evidence, amassing specimens, observations and correspondence that whispered the same radical truth: that all life had evolved on Earth through a process Darwin termed 'natural selection'.

He had long intended to publish his theory, but the weight of controversy and the seemingly blasphemous enormity of the claim had made him reluctant. Today, however, hesitation would no longer be an option.

A letter had arrived from the Malay Archipelago (although some believe it had been delivered a month earlier, but was only read by Darwin on 18 June). It bore the return name of the naturalist and explorer Alfred Russel Wallace. Darwin slit open the envelope, unfolding a letter and an accompanying essay.

As his eyes travelled across the pages, he caught his breath. Wallace had, in startling clarity, outlined a theory nearly identical to Darwin's own – a process by which species diverged and adapted through survival of the fittest. It was, in essence, the same mechanism Darwin had painstakingly documented ever since his famous voyage aboard HMS *Beagle* in the 1830s. The shock was electric.

Had he waited too long? Was the discovery now to be shared with another? Darwin felt admiration, yes – Wallace's work was brilliant. But there was also urgency, a sudden realisation that if he did not act, history might pass him by. With trembling fingers, he gathered Wallace's manuscript and his own notes. There was no selfishness in his mind – only a duty to science, to truth. He must act.

Darwin reached for a pen. He wrote swiftly, explaining the uncanny parallel between the findings to Charles Lyell, a trusted friend and prominent scientist. What should be done to resolve the situation? Acknowledging Lyell's earlier insistence that he go public with his theory, Darwin wrote: "I never saw a more striking coincidence… if Wallace had my M.S. [manuscript] sketch

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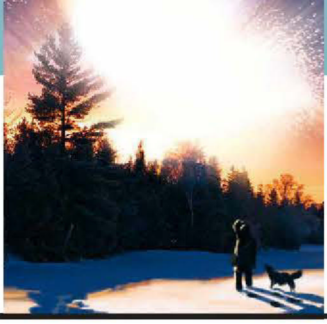
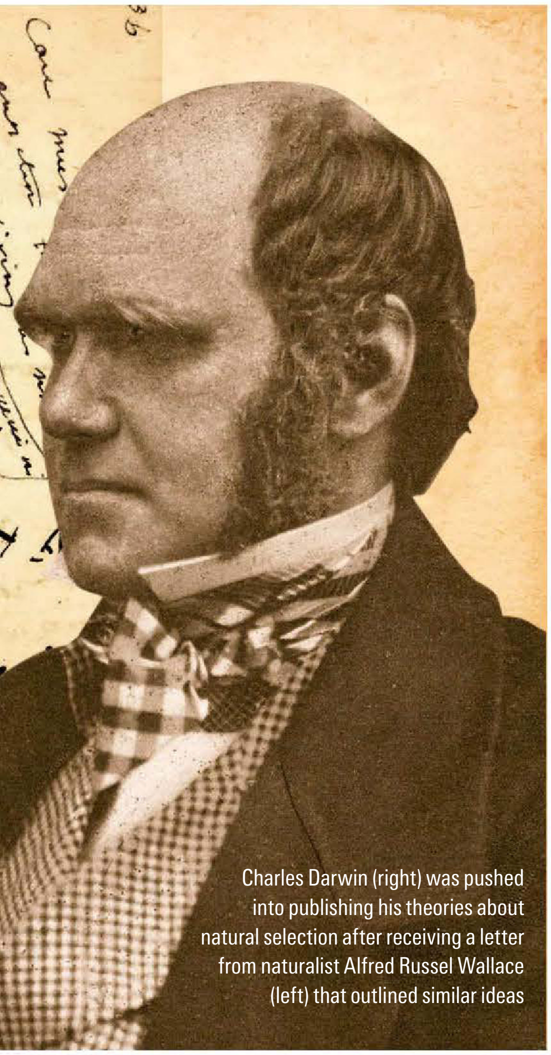


The Tunguska event may have been caused by an asteroid exploding in the atmosphere

30 JUNE 1908

A massive explosion rips through central Siberia, flattening 800 square miles of forest. No impact crater is found, sparking questions about how an asteroid or comet could have caused the 'Tunguska event'.



Charles Darwin (right) was pushed into publishing his theories about natural selection after receiving a letter from naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace (left) that outlined similar ideas

written out in 1842 he could not have made a better short abstract!"

Darwin had long feared the reaction his ideas would provoke, but now there was no turning back. Within weeks, following advice from Lyell and botanist Joseph Hooker, a compromise was reached – both Darwin's and Wallace's work would be jointly presented to the Linnean Society in London, a prestigious organisation devoted to the study of natural history. But it was Darwin's exhaustive evidence, his years of meticulous research, that would form the foundation of a revolution in thought, leading to the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in November 1859.

Melvyn Bragg and guests profiled Charles Darwin in a special series of shows for BBC Radio 4, *Darwin: In Our Time*: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00g9zb3*

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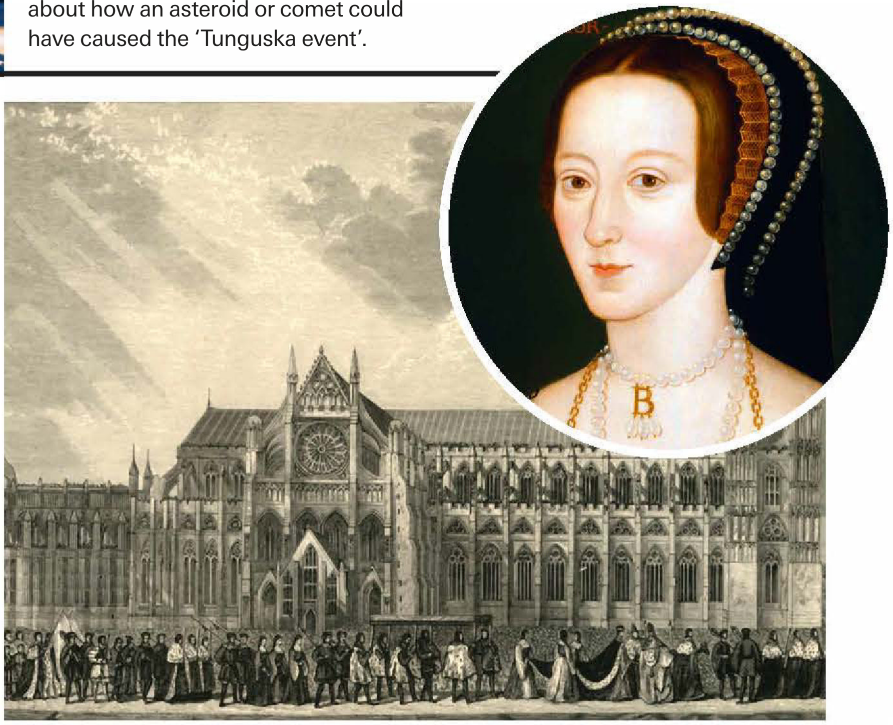

A 19th-century illustration shows the coronation procession of Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife

1 JUNE 1533

Anne Boleyn is crowned Queen of England

Henry VIII's new consort brings the promise of a longed-for son

The morning blazed with late spring light as London stirred to the sounds of trumpets and pealing bells. Anne Boleyn, intelligent, ambitious and six months pregnant, was to be crowned Queen of England. This was the woman for whom a king had defied the pope, a kingdom had been upended and the king's beloved first wife had been cast aside.

Three days earlier, Anne had made her ceremonial entry along the Thames from Greenwich to the Tower of London. Greeted by nobles, she lodged in royal apartments, just as monarchs did before their coronations. It was a moment of personal victory: the Tower, a symbol of royal power was now to be the launchpad for her ascent.

Borne through London to Westminster Hall on a litter draped with white and gold, Anne wore crimson velvet, while her dark hair fell loose behind her back, signifying her virtue. The city streets had been transformed: sweet herbs scattered underfoot, triumphal arches erected and pageantry at every turn. Crowds pressed in, some cheering, some watching in wary silence.

The procession was both spectacle and statement. At its heart was not only Anne, but her unborn child – the tantalising promise of a male heir, the justification for Henry's break with Rome and the future of the Tudor dynasty.

At Westminster Abbey, Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury anointed her and placed the ancient crown of St Edward upon her head. No queen consort had ever been accorded this honour before. That night, London celebrated with feasting and revelry as Queen Anne caressed the unmistakable bump that she hoped heralded a golden age for her realm.

Danny Bird is content producer on *BBC History Magazine*

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THE CONVERSATION

EXPERTS DEBATE HISTORY'S BIGGEST ISSUES

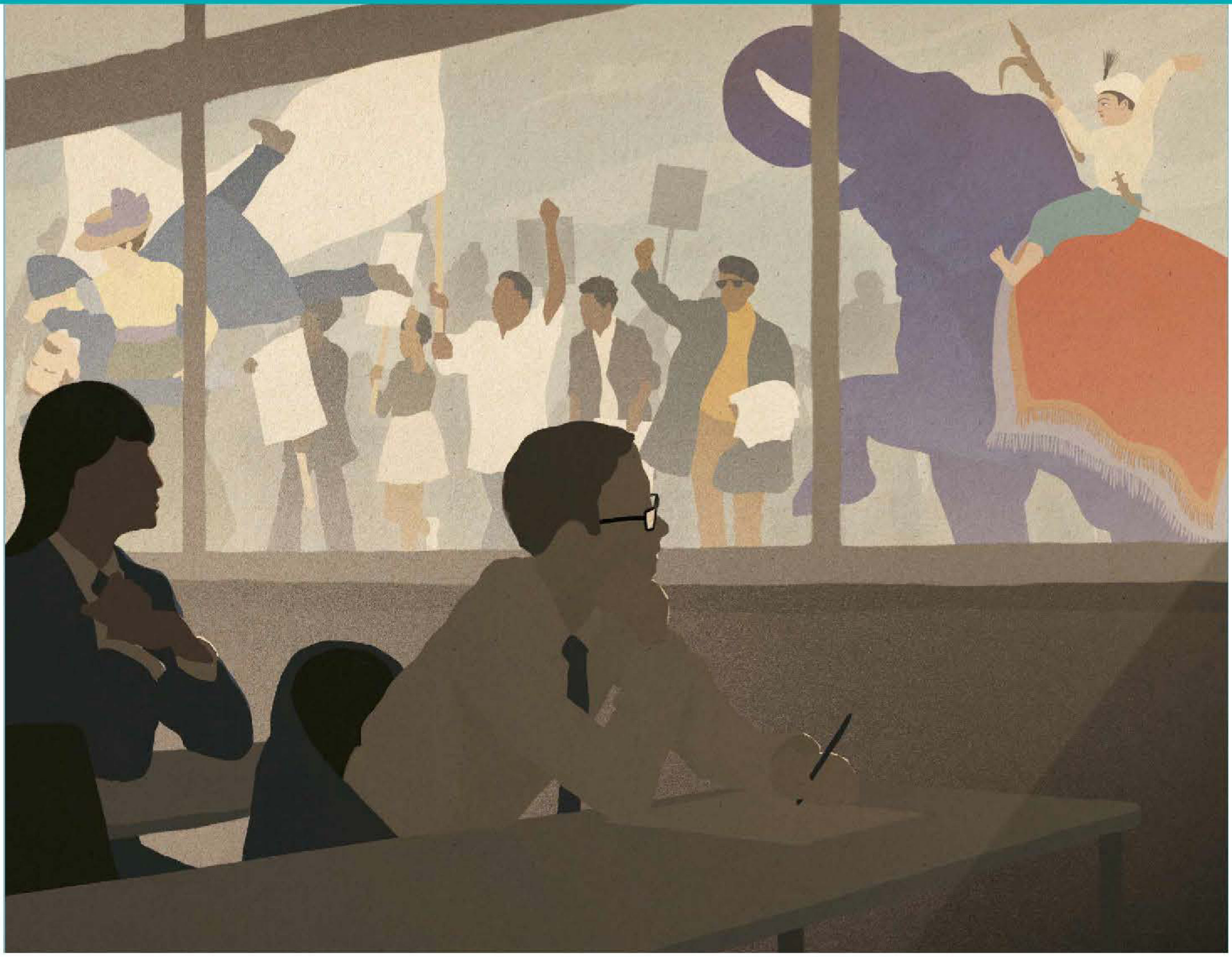
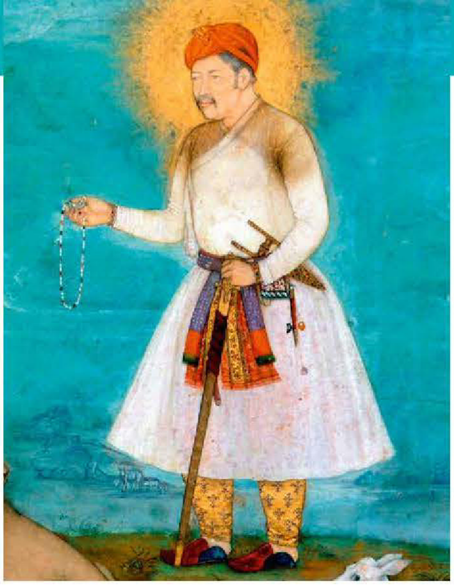


ILLUSTRATION BY **HUGH COWLING**

OPINION

"Which historical figures will capture the imagination of a class on a rainy Thursday afternoon?"

History teacher and writer **SHALINA PATEL** discusses how to make the subject appealing and relevant to a diverse range of students today – and envisages what lessons might look like in 25 years' time



Spicy stories Mughal emperor Akbar the Great, whose reign overlapped with Elizabeth I. Tales of the Mughal court are as thrilling as any from Tudor England

There are always surprises to discover in history – surprises that can help engage even the most uninterested student.

I always look forward to teaching pupils about the suffragettes. So imagine my delight when I learned that one prominent figure in the movement, Sophia Duleep Singh (1876–1948), was the daughter of a Sikh maharaja. She was also connected to British royalty, making it even more surprising that I had never heard of her.

Discovering her story impacted me significantly, and it is now a key component of my lesson on that period of history. Tellingly, when we ask Year 9 students (typically 13 or 14 years old) which historical figure that they've learned about at school should have a statue erected to them, Sophia is among the most popular answers. English Heritage has at least now installed a blue plaque in her honour at Faraday House, the residence at Hampton Court granted to her by her godmother, Queen Victoria.

Having relished learning and teaching about Sophia Duleep Singh, I pondered the question: which other hidden figures could I unearth to connect with history topics that I was already teaching my students?

It has been my mission – thankfully, one shared by the history teachers with whom I work – to ensure that diverse stories are no longer relegated to designated weeks or months of the year, but are embedded within the narratives to which they belong, so that students receive a richer, broader and more balanced historical education. To achieve that, I've had to reflect on my own understanding of history, leading me to challenge the narratives typically presented in school textbooks and resources.

Researching and re-planning a curriculum does not happen overnight. It requires continual review as more historical research is undertaken and published. Within the confines of the school timetable, it's not possible to teach students everything that ever happened – but it *is* possible to paint a picture that is as full as possible, including details that have all too often been left out in past tellings.

Unsung heroine Sikh princess Sophia Duleep Singh, pictured as a volunteer nurse during the First World War. Her story inspires students today

The current national curriculum in England for history is not prescriptive. It gives teachers the latitude to teach historical contexts of our choosing, as long as specific time periods are covered – for example, medieval – and the Holocaust is taught, which is the only statutory requirement. It is therefore entirely possible in 2025 to teach a broad and diverse curriculum – but only if teachers and schools choose to do so.

Building bridges

Ensuring history lessons are engaging to a diverse range of students requires careful planning, research and time. Part of this process involves deciding which key events in British history we deem non-negotiable for teaching, and then linking those to other places in order to build an even richer understanding of that period. These 'bridges' and 'windows' into other countries, regions and nations allow students to zoom out of the British context and see what else was happening in the world at any given time.

For example, while Elizabeth I was ruling England, the Mughal emperor Akbar the Great was ruling India. We know students enjoy learning about the dramatic lives and actions of the Tudor family; the story of the Mughals is awash with similar episodes, including multiple marriages and beheadings aplenty. The histories of the Tudors and Mughals are, of course, intertwined anyway: the East India Company – which later ruled huge swathes of the subcontinent – was granted its royal charter by Elizabeth in December 1600, during the final years of Akbar's rule.

We also strongly consider the context in which our students first meet different groups of people. They encounter Jewish history initially not in the context of the Holocaust but by studying medieval Jewish life. For example, we introduce the Anglo-Jewish businesswoman Licoricia of Winchester who, despite the huge challenges, discrimination and threats faced by Jews in England in the 13th century, forged a successful financial career – before being murdered in what may have been a hate crime.

Similarly, we don't want our students to first encounter black history through the prism of the transatlantic slave trade. So they learn about medieval African kingdoms such as Mali and its 14th-century ruler Mansa Musa – reputedly the richest man who ever lived. Nor does our students' understanding of black history end there: it's embedded throughout the curriculum, right across the 20th century. I'm proud of the units we teach on the post-1945 British civil rights movement, including studies of the Bristol bus boycott of 1963 and the trial of the 'Mangrove Nine' in 1971 – proceedings that ended with the acquittal of the black British activists involved, and a groundbreaking acknowledgement of racial prejudice within the Metropolitan Police.

We also consider the impacts of individuals from history, asking: which figures will capture the imagination of a Year 9 class on a rainy Thursday afternoon? Because it's these individuals whom students will remember. For many people – partly as a result of the way the subject is taught at school – the story of the suffragettes is dominated by the Pankhursts and Emily Davison, but there are so many other figures to introduce. There's Sophia Duleep Singh, of course, who also volunteered as a nurse during the First World War, spoke out for Indian independence, and would not be silenced in advocating for the Women's Social and Political Union – not even by Churchill. But my students also encounter many other less-known suffragettes, ranging from Edith Garrud – responsible for training 'suffra-jitsu' – to polio survivor Rosa May Billinghurst, who shows that not all suffragettes were able-bodied.

Such stories can help support the teaching of really complex moments. I had struggled to teach the partition of India in 1947, but the testimonies of people interviewed by Kavita Puri for her *Partition Voices* series on BBC Radio 4 help Year 8 students connect with this history.

Particularly in the post-Covid world, in which students sometimes struggle with

ALAMY

Fuelling the troops Indian soldiers prepare chapatis in east Africa in 1916. "It's crucial that the roles played by millions of men and women from across the British empire are part of our war stories," says Shalina Patel

ALAMY

verbal communication, the classroom can provide so many opportunities for rich and complex discussions. I recently had a brilliant exchange with my Year 8 class about the proposed repatriation of the skull of an Indian soldier killed during the Indian Rebellion of 1857, which turned up in a Kent pub in the 1960s. One student observed that the man's family should be able to give him an appropriate burial; another argued it should be in a museum so that people can learn about this important history. Whether discussing issues of imperialism, slavery or bystanders, it continues to surprise me how maturely and sensitively students can express ideas when given appropriate information and prompts.

Hidden figures

Another question at the heart of my lesson planning – and, indeed, my book *The History Lessons* – is: who *else* was there in these key moments in history? It was sparked by an incident in my early years of teaching when, during a lesson on soldiers' experiences in the First World War, a Year 9 student asked: "Was there halal food in the trenches?" At the time, I didn't know the answer. Today, I can teach my students that not only was halal food provided for Muslim soldiers, but soldiers from the Indian Army were also given ghee (clarified butter), spices such as turmeric, lentils to make daal, and atta (fine wheat flour) to make chapatis. This is important, because it's crucial that the roles played by millions of men and women from across the British empire are part of our war stories.

Ultimately, by asking ourselves this question we can help our students to challenge their assumptions about the past. The stage *can* be shared – and should be. We should learn about D-Day and VE Day, of course. But we should also spread an understanding that many largely unsung heroes and heroines contributed to British victory. These include such inspiring individuals as the spy Noor Inayat Khan, who worked undercover in France for the Special Operations Executive before being betrayed and captured, and was then executed in 1944. Or soldiers in the often-forgotten Fourteenth Army, mainly comprising Indian and African troops, who continued to fight in Asia after Germany surrendered on the European front.

Having been taught such histories, this generation of students will leave school with a wider and more extensive understanding of our nation's past than those who came before them. I've tried to achieve the same effect for adults via my book. The past was diverse, and our education should reflect that reality. The fact that this can be done today is thanks in large part to the powerful work undertaken by researchers and historians – including David Olusoga, Hallie Rubenhold, Fern Riddell, Anita Anand, Miranda Kaufmann, Shrabani Basu, Kavita Puri and Peter Frankopan – in providing fresh perspectives on familiar stories.

> **"Arming students with the skills to rigorously interrogate sources will become even more imperative in future"**

Forward thinking

So much for making school history lessons more diverse over the past quarter-century or so. How might we be teaching the subject in another 25 years' time?

Classrooms themselves will certainly look very different, thanks to advances in technology – but so might the curriculum. I currently teach an A-level course on British history up to 2001; will students in 2050 learn about the impacts of Brexit and Covid? As the climate and nature crises bite more deeply, will there be more engagement with climate history, exploring the loss of biodiversity and other impacts?

Textbooks are increasingly reflecting a shift in how the British empire is taught, moving beyond a binary 'good versus bad' argument. Perhaps in 25 years such broad approaches will be fully embedded in all curriculums, not just in some schools.

New technology creates new challenges, of course. As teachers, we're already having to learn to address online misinformation and the problematic misconceptions about history that can arise from encountering such material. Arming students with the skills to effectively evaluate the provenance of information, and to rigorously interrogate sources, will no doubt be even more imperative to our future colleagues in 2050.

That said, there's no doubt that further advances in areas such as AI could enhance history teaching. Might students be immersed in past events via virtual reality, rather than just reading about them in textbooks? Already, they can pose questions to Holocaust survivors via Dimensions in Testimony, an incredible interactive project using specialised language technology, developed by the USC Shoah Foundation. Imagine how transformative it could be if students had the opportunity to question historical figures? The future of teaching the past might still be very bright.

Shalina Patel is a historian, teacher and author. The paperback of her first book, *The History Lessons*, is out now, published by Icon

25TH ANNIVERSARY

"A reader wrote in and said 'That's my mum!'"

BBC History Magazine is 25 years old. To mark that milestone, 13 members of the team, past and present, selected the front cover from the past quarter of a century that resonates with them most

BBC
History magazine
INSIDE
■ MICHAEL WOOD ON THE INCAS
■ CROMWELL GOES ON TRIAL
■ WIN A HISTORY CRUISE
Babes in arms
The young rebels who overthrew postwar Britain
EXCLUSIVE CD

The birth of something new
May 2000

My cover choice is the very first issue, published in the same month I was born – we share a birthday! The image of Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair as babies is very striking – I'm not sure it's a composition that would find its way onto the magazine's cover today. And I love the addition of an 'exclusive CD.' My colleagues might be surprised to learn that I do know what a CD (and even a cassette tape) is!

Lauren Good,
digital content producer

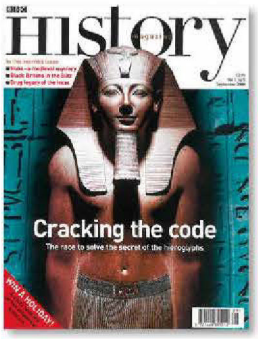
BBC
History magazine
In this month's issue
■ 19th-century eco-protest
■ Last days of an emperor
■ Triumph of the Vikings
£2.99
Vol 1, no 2
June 2000
Women at war
HOW THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN CHANGED OUR LIVES

The mother of surprises
June 2000

Magazine covers are an editor's children – they are all your favourites, until the sales figures come in and the next cover has to be planned. As the magazine's founding editor, I recall the lengthy discussions surrounding each new issue, and what we learned from readers about what aspect of the cover first persuaded them to pick up a copy – or not.

As a modern historian, my favourite covers include the June 2000 issue, featuring a black-and-white photo of a young aircraft spotter from the Second World War. There was great delight when a reader wrote in saying: "That's my mum!"

Greg Neale, founding editor


BBC
History magazine
Cracking the code
The race to solve the secret of the hieroglyphs
WIN A HOLIDAY

I felt like Howard Carter!
September 2000

This early issue boasted a striking image of Thutmose III – a cover seared into my memory. I bought it as a precocious child with dreams of becoming an Egyptologist, blissfully unaware I'd end up working for the magazine two decades later. Imagine my delight when I recently unearthed a copy in our archives, like Howard Carter uncovering Tutankhamun! That cover still gives me the same thrill it did back at the dawn of the millennium.

Danny Bird,
content producer

BBC
History
magazine
THE DAMAGED DREAM
Battlefield Britain
Who is the once and future king?

A new gold standard
August 2004

This was the first issue produced in Bristol (the magazine was initially published in London), with a team of new and old faces, led by David Musgrove – now our content director. I've designed hundreds of magazines since, but this issue was a big milestone for me. The pressure was on to maintain the high quality. Plus, I had to create all the page templates in new software. The layout inside is very dense compared to now, while the advert for the 2000 and 2001 magazine archive on CD-ROM (a steal at £42.40!) offers a glance back to the early digital age.

Susanne Frank, art director

The debate rages on
January 2006

I remember this cover well, because we expected it might become a talking point in the national conversation. And it did. I recall having to do a few interviews to justify our methodology, which was pretty simple – we asked 10 historians to nominate the worst figure from their century of expertise and explain why, and then we opened it up for debate. Debate was certainly had, and continues to be had, when the piece resurfaces online every now and again.

Having worked on the magazine for more than two decades now, I spend a lot of time thinking about legacy and what our responsibility is to those who have gone before us. But if lives have been lived in ways that were seen as iniquitous by their contemporaries – as, for instance, King John's clearly was – then I think it's reasonable to reflect that today.

David Musgrove, content director

BBC
History
magazine
ELEPHANT MAN
AMERICAN IDOL
VOTING FOR HITLER
10 WORST BRITONS
REVEALED
We name the most villainous figures of the past thousand years
PLUS KIPLING'S DILEMMA CRISIS IN CARACAS RENAISSANCE ZOMBIES

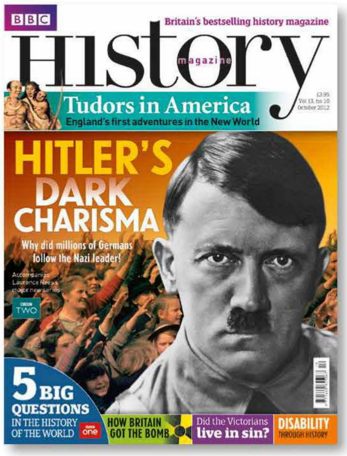
BBC
History
www.bbchistorymagazine.com
WW1 REMEMBRANCE ISSUE
11 November 1918
First World War 90th Anniversary Special
PLUS Niall Ferguson on money and Linda Colley on British liberty

Starkness and simplicity
November 2008

When I started working on *BBC History Magazine* almost 20 years ago, the centenary of the First World War still lay in the future and the conflict remained within the bounds of living memory.

Fast-forward to 2025 and things are very different. The last Tommies are dead and the trenches have receded further into the historical rear-view mirror. And yet some things never change. The First World War remains today a terrible, haunting symbol of war's futility, just as it did in 2008. We've run plenty of First World War covers over the past 18 years but, to my mind, this one's the best. In its starkness and its simplicity, it captures that sense of futility perfectly.

Spencer Mizen, senior production editor

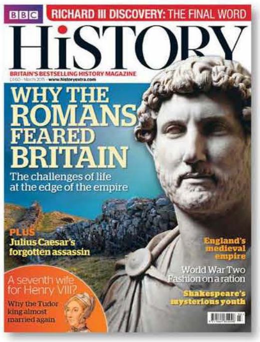

BBC
Britain's bestselling history magazine
History
magazine
Tudors in America
England's first adventures in the New World
HITLER'S DARK CHARISMA
Why did millions of Germans follow the Nazi leader?
5 BIG QUESTIONS IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD
HOW BRITAIN GOT THE BOMB
Did the Victorians live in sin?
DISABILITY THROUGH HISTORY

A controversial cover star
October 2012

One of the challenges of working on a history magazine is presenting in an appealing way subjects that are challenging, contentious or controversial. Should we sell magazines using covers featuring historical figures or events that are distasteful, or which reflect the darkest episodes of the past? Those are some of the questions that came to the fore when discussing covers such as this, bearing an image of Adolf Hitler. It's probably not an accident that he has only featured on the first page on one more occasion in the years since.

Matt Elton, deputy editor

Statuesque good looks
March 2015


BBC
RICHARD III DISCOVERY: THE FINAL WORD
HISTORY
BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE
WHY THE ROMANS FEARED BRITAIN
The challenges of life at the edge of the empire
PLUS Julius Caesar's forgotten assassin
A seventh wife for Henry VIII?
England's medieval empire
World War Two fashion on a ration
Shakespeare's mysterious youth

From photoshopping Edward I's nose to evoking the famous typography of the Star Wars opening crawl, we on the art team have done it all over the years. This means it's challenging to pick a single cover, as there are so many memories attached to every one, but I have to go with this one, featuring the Roman emperor Hadrian. He's a natural cover star: he's handsome, his statue has a good contrast of light and shadow, and he faces the audience confidently. He stands tall and proud over Hadrian's wall – iconic. Nothing says Roman Britain more than this.

Rachel Dickens, senior deputy art editor

ELIZABETH I'S IRISH NEMESIS
HISTORY MAGAZINE
ESCAPING THE WORKHOUSE
The Victorian war on child poverty
MARS FEVER!
PLUS
THE EMPERORS' ASSASSINS
The bloody rise of Rome's Praetorian Guard

My double-take moment
March 2017

Among the many brilliant illustrations and portraits that have graced the magazine's cover, this single photograph featuring two Victorian children was one of the first to be published after I joined the team. I remember admiring how the bold use of the photo created a 'double take' moment as you compare the small, grown-up frowns and bold stances of the boys with their apparent young age. Eight years later, I still love how this cover makes the past feel close and recognisable. Elsewhere, the mixture of some spicy coverlines on social media and Brexit debates of the day, and a punchy promise of bloody Roman assassinations, cements this as one of my favourites.

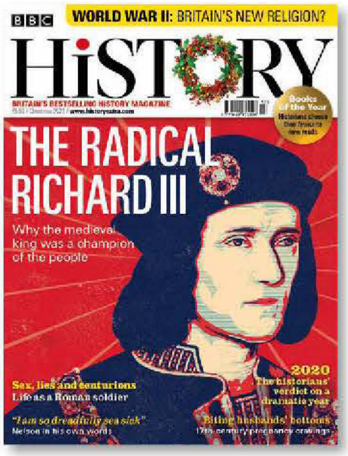
Elinor Evans, digital editor

BBC
MEDIEVAL MAGIC
FROM HEALING SPELLS TO SUMMONING DEMONS
HISTORY MAGAZINE
BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE
VICTORY
Why the Allies triumphed in WW2
Max Hastings, James Holland and others on the key reasons for the Nazis' defeat
PLUS
The blood-soaked path to peace
Britain's fight to the finish
Memories of VE Day

A time of national uncertainty – and community spirit
May 2020

May 2020 was our first lockdown issue, produced in our kitchens, sheds and children's bedrooms. It was published at a time of great uncertainty – and hardship – for millions of Britons, but it also coincided with the 75th anniversary of VE Day, as reflected in the cover. Though this had been planned weeks in advance, the striking image and headline seemed particularly apt for a country going through a difficult time – a reminder that victories can be won, even when they seem a long way off.

Rob Attar, editor


BBC
WORLD WAR II: BRITAIN'S NEW RELIGION?
HISTORY
BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE
Books of the Year
THE RADICAL RICHARD III
Why the medieval king was a champion of the people
Sex, lies and centurions
Life as a Roman soldier
"I am so dreadfully sea sick"
Nelson in his own words
2020
The historians' verdict on a dramatic year
Biting husbands' bottoms

From street art to biting bottoms
Christmas 2020

Richard III's enduring fascination has brought him to our cover multiple times. With only a few existing portraits, we must think creatively to present him in a unique and engaging way. For our Christmas 2020 cover, we crafted a pastiche of the street artist Shepard Fairey's style, most known for his 2008 'HOPE' poster, which became closely associated with Barack Obama's presidential campaign. This bold approach mirrors the article's new perspective on Richard's character.

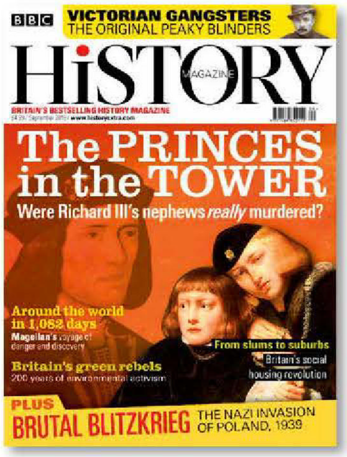
Plus, who *isn't* intrigued by the coverline "Biting husbands' bottoms"?

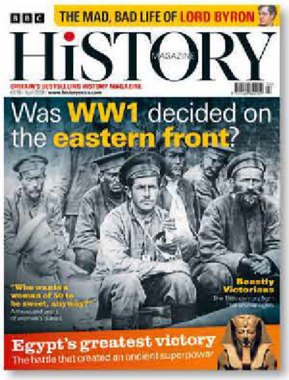
Rosemary Smith, video editor

Murder allegations
September 2019

Love him or hate him, no one can sell a cover like Richard III. As someone who was previously a bit baffled by the enduring fascination with the controversial medieval king, I was inspired by this cover feature to embark on my very first *HistoryExtra* podcast series, investigating whether he murdered the princes in the Tower. Admittedly, it was impossible to come to a definitive conclusion some five centuries on, but researching the series did help me understand why people are still so enthralled by the question of whether Richard was a murderous villain or unfairly maligned. Which do I believe? Well, that would be telling…

Ellie Cawthorne, podcast editor


BBC
VICTORIAN GANGSTERS
THE ORIGINAL PEAKY BLINDERS
HISTORY MAGAZINE
BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE
The PRINCES in the TOWER
Were Richard III's nephews really murdered?
Around the world in 1,062 days
Britain's green rebels
From slums to suburbs
PLUS
BRUTAL BLITZKRIEG
THE NAZI INVASION OF POLAND, 1939


BBC
THE MAD, BAD LIFE OF LORD BYRON
HISTORY MAGAZINE
Was WW1 decided on the eastern front?
Beastly Victorians
Egypt's greatest victory
The battle that created an ancient superpower

Raw, human and moving
April 2024

As the picture editor, I'm usually focused on choosing the most visually striking image to illustrate our cover story. But this cover picture goes beyond that: it stays with you. The eye contact with these injured soldiers is powerful and personal. You can see the toll the war has taken on them etched into their faces. It's raw, human and moving. It doesn't just illustrate a story, but makes you feel it, too. H

Sam Nott, picture editor

›› **On page 51,** 25 experts nominate the most important historical discoveries of the past 25 years

FRAN MONKS

MICHAEL WOOD ON…

PAUL KLEE'S ANGEL OF HISTORY

"Few works of 20th-century art have such a distinguished list of past owners"

A POSTWAR BABY BOOMER AND A LATE SIXTIES student, in my adult life I naturally grew up optimistic. I believed in progress. I witnessed the civil rights movement, feminism, decolonisation, the beginning of 'Reform and Opening Up' in China at the end of the seventies, and the break-up of the communist tyranny in Europe a decade later.

Not that there weren't bad things in the world: horrific wars in Vietnam and Biafra (Nigeria), the ravages of international capitalism, the first manifest intimations of climate disaster. But, despite terrors in far-off places, it seemed that – to paraphrase Martin Luther King – the long arc of the moral universe was indeed bending to justice. But now?

On the wall in my student room I had a black-and-white copy of a monoprint by the artist Paul Klee. He served as a soldier in the German army in the First World War – a conflict in which a number of his friends, including fellow artists such as August Macke and Franz Marc, were killed. When the war was over, Klee returned to his art, and in 1920 created the picture that I put on my wall.

He called it *Angelus Novus* – New Angel – and it is now the subject of a compelling new exhibition at the Bode-Museum in Berlin, displayed alongside images and sculptures of angels from Berlin museums that were smashed by bombing in the Second World War. There are excerpts, too, from Wim Wenders' famous film *Wings of Desire* (1987), in which two mournful angels stand watch over the people of a divided Berlin, and in which Klee's picture is namechecked. More than 100 years on from its creation, *Angelus Novus* is now seen as one of the seminal artworks of the 20th century.

It shows a strange, deformed creature – a weird, scrawny, transparent homunculus, wings raised, hair like parchment scrolls, cloven bird feet, opaque eyes looking sideways at something that causes distress (or is it wonder?). Behind him are eddying clouds of chaos. The title suggests the beginning of a new order. Perhaps we might better translate it as 'Angel of the New Age'.

At least, that implicitly was the haunting interpretation by the great cultural critic and essayist Walter Benjamin who, like so many, saw the First World War as a shattering blow to the idea of European civilisation. A friend of Klee, Benjamin was possessed by the image, and bought the monoprint in 1921; he hung it in his office in Berlin, and took it with him wherever he moved, carrying it on his exile from Germany in 1933. For Benjamin, the figure was the Angel of History – "a melancholy view of historical process as an unceasing cycle of despair".

In 1940, trapped on the Spanish border after the Nazi invasion of France, Benjamin – a Jew – killed himself. Before he died, he gave the picture to a friend, the novelist and poet Georges Bataille. He kept the Angel safe during the remainder of the war, then passed it on to the German philosopher, musicologist and cultural theorist Theodor Adorno. As Benjamin had asked, Adorno sent it to his old friend Gershom Scholem, the great historian and scholar of Jewish mysticism. (Surely few works of 20th-century art have such a distinguished list of previous owners!).

Scholem's widow, Fania Freud, eventually gave the picture to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where it remains today – still dangerous, crackling (as it were) with a mysterious spiritual radioactivity. It's an iconic image for the 20th century, certainly, but for our own century, too. That's a heavy weight to bear for a small picture, but on it our view of history is inscribed: a warning from the past.

Here's what Benjamin wrote about the picture in his 1940 essay *Theses on the Philosophy of History*: "His eyes are staring, his mouth open, his wings spread. This is how one pictures the Angel of History. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.

"The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole again what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm is irresistibly propelling him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress." H

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series. His books include *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). You'll find him on X at *MichaelWoodMV*

BBC

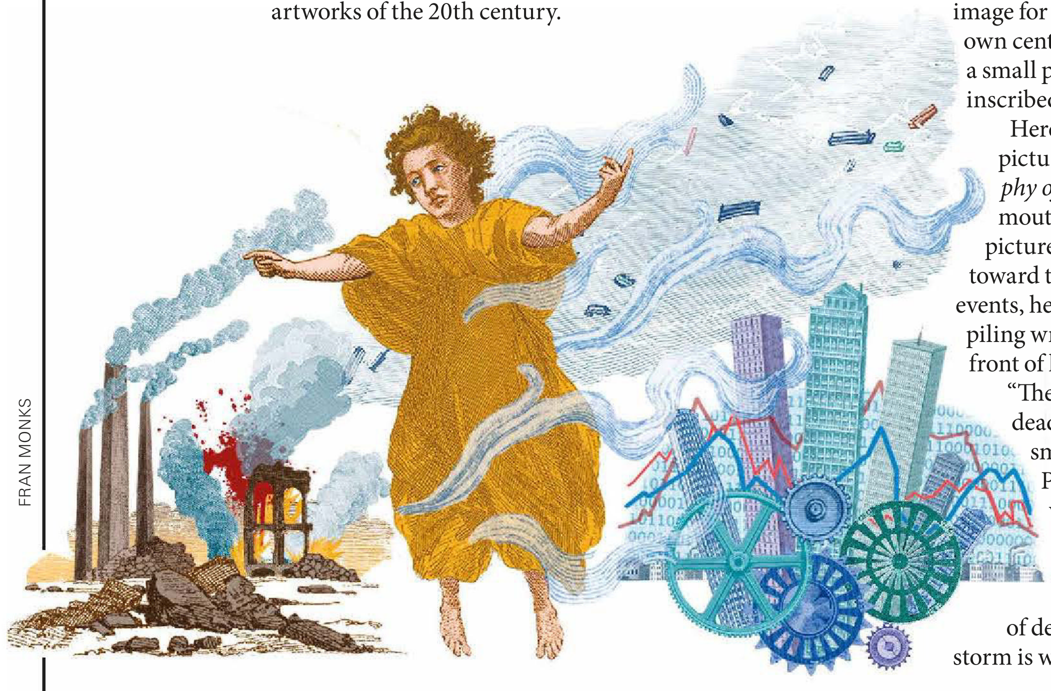


ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

HIDDEN HISTORIES

KAVITA PURI on long-neglected stories revealed in Rio de Janeiro

"Samba schools used the carnival to foreground overlooked histories"

Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Her latest BBC Sounds podcast, *Three Million*, charts the 1943 Bengal Famine and won Gold in the New Podcast category at the 2024 British Podcast Awards

BBC RADIO 4

I WAS RECENTLY IN RIO DE JANEIRO, IN A warehouse on the outskirts of the city, admiring some of the brightly coloured floats that had featured in this year's world-famous carnival. Each spring, just before the start of Lent, hundreds of thousands of people attend the parades in the city's Sambadrome stadium and enjoy watching the floats. Like pieces of art many metres high, they are designed and intricately handmade in Rio's numerous *escolas de samba* (samba schools), each strongly identified with a local neighbourhood. The schools are organised into leagues for the carnival, during which they compete for the prestigious design award.

Pre-Lenten festivities in Brazil began in the early 18th century, during the Portuguese colonial era. The Catholic influence is evident in the name of the event, which is believed to derive from the Latin *carnem vale* (farewell to meat) or *carnem levare* (remove meat), referring to the 40-day period of abstinence leading up to Easter.

It's said that the earliest form of the festivities in Brazil evolved from the pre-Lenten Entrudo, celebrated by immigrants from other Portuguese colonies on the Azores, Madeira and Cabo Verde. During that festival, people soaked each other with buckets of water and hurled mud and food, wreaking cheery mayhem that often degenerated into street brawls.

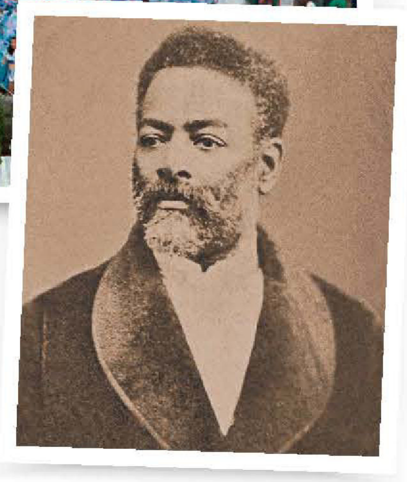
In the 19th century, more organised parades attracted elite participants: even the Portuguese emperor joined in the celebrations, together with aristocrats wearing masks and extravagant costumes. Carnival balls were arranged, with music from Europe such as polkas and waltzes becoming popular. By the middle of that century, street parades with horse-drawn floats and military bands had become the focal points.

It wasn't until the early 20th century that samba – the music and dance style most strongly associated with carnival today – was developed by Afro-Brazilians whose ancestors had been transported to South America, many of them enslaved, over the preceding centuries. Brazil declared independence from Portugal in 1822, but slavery was not abolished there until 1888 – more than 65 years later.

One of the first *escolas de samba* was established in 1928 in the *barrio* (district) of Mangueira, a little west of the city's historic centre. More soon sprang up, enjoying strong community links – particularly in the poorer *favelas* (shanty towns), where they offered people a way to come together and organise themselves while avoiding police oppression. The schools' theme songs and floats became outlets for political expression, voicing concerns about dictatorship, hunger, the environment, education – and, perhaps most tellingly, the Afro-Brazilian experience, social inequalities and indigenous rights.

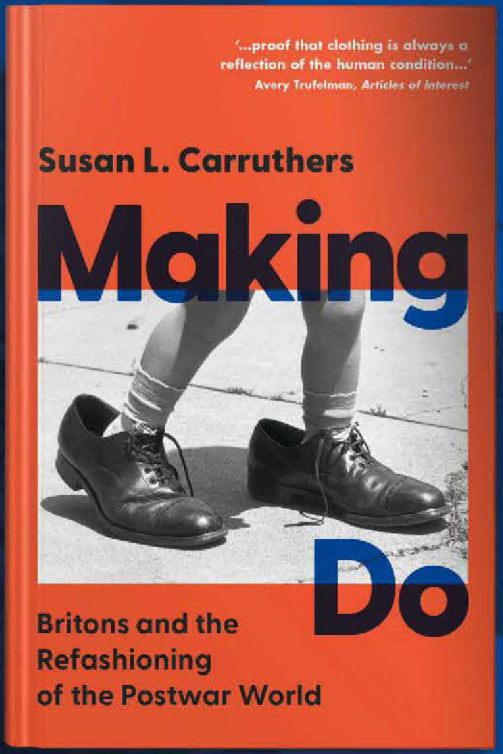
The schools have also used appearances in the competition – now held in the Sambadrome stadium built for the purpose in 1984 – to foreground overlooked histories. Last year, the Portela school highlighted the extraordinary story of Luíz Gama. Born in 1830 to a trafficked African woman, he escaped enslavement and went on to become a lawyer (in fact, he is considered by many to be Brazil's first black lawyer) and a leading abolitionist. His story was retold through four incarnations of his figure on a float. Watched live by tens of thousands of spectators in the Sambadrome and broadcast around the country, it introduced him to a vast new audience.

The music, dance, costumes and extraordinary floats of carnival represent a huge source of local pride. The schools spend much of each year raising money, working in the communities, and planning and preparing for the next competition. Though a joyous and hugely fun event for all, Rio's carnival plays an important role in highlighting long-neglected stories, histories and issues. H



ABOVE: The float of the Tradição samba school sports a giant eagle at the 1990 carnival
RIGHT: Luíz Gama, pictured c1880. A leading abolitionist, his life was celebrated on a float in 2024

GETTY IMAGES



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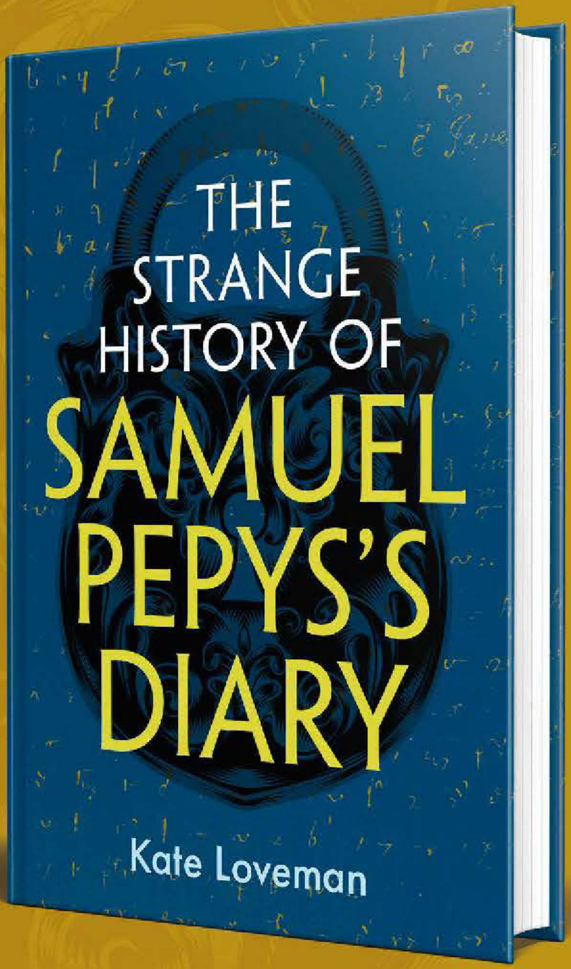


THE STRANGE HISTORY OF SAMUEL PEPYS'S DIARY
Kate Loveman

LETTERS

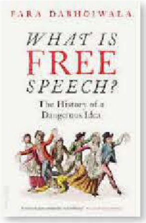
LETTER OF THE MONTH

The car park… duke?

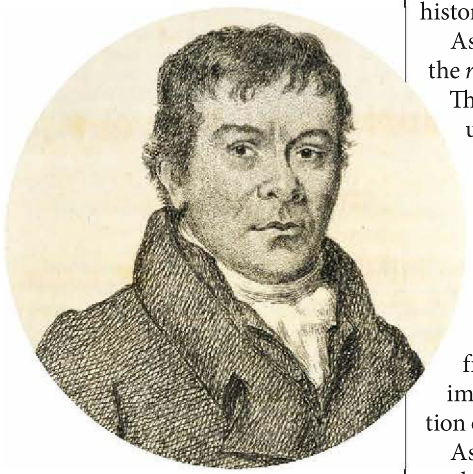
Your April cover story on Richard III states that “history isn’t often made in car parks”. Another car park in which history *was* made, however, is Keyfield Terrace car park in St Albans. At 10am on 22 May 1455, the Wars of the Roses began there when the Duke of York ordered his army to leave Keyfield, an open space in which the army had briefly encamped, and attack the Lancastrian army in St Albans.

Although there is currently no commemoration of this event, a group of local heritage bodies led by the Battlefields Trust is hoping to be able to install a signboard at the site.

Peter Burley, Hertfordshire



We reward the Letter of the Month writer with a copy of a new book. This issue, that’s **What Is Free Speech? The History of a Dangerous Idea** by Fara Dabhoiwala. Read our review on page 74



Activist Robert Wedderburn as depicted in an 1824 engraving. Reader Andrew Stone remembers an encounter with one of Wedderburn’s descendants

Night shifts

I enjoyed your *Q&A* article in the May issue on collectors of ‘night soil’ [a polite term for human excrement]. However, I am surprised that you did not mention that this task was carried out by local council workmen in rural areas as late on as the 1960s and 70s. My father was a government auditor, and he remembers seeing local council accounts of workers receiving an additional night soil collection payment of 4d per hour for this function.

As far as he can remember, the task went on to the mid-1970s, when widespread until sewage collection and disposal systems began to be provided by water boards.

Helen Briscoe, Goole

Radical roots

Your recent article on Robert Wedderburn (*Amazing Life*, April) took me back a few years to when I was interviewing prospective students for my college. One candidate had the surname Wedderburn, and I remarked upon the connection to the girl’s father. He proudly told me that the redoubtable working-class activist was a shared ancestor. We briefly basked in a shared historical appreciation before getting back to the important business at hand!

Andrew Stone, London

Defining issues

The phrase ‘history changed’ [used by Tom Holland in relation to Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon, in an interview in our March issue] prompts a fundamental question, critical to this magazine and to all who love history. What *is* history?

As the word suggests, ‘history’ is the *record of what happened* in the past. The problem is that, to many or most of us, ‘history’ is *what happened*. The record is made by reporters whether ancient or modern, and whether flawed, biased and ignorant, or expert, meticulous and cautious – and whatever their motivation. But *what happened cannot be changed*. It is the *record* of what happened that changes from era to era, as Tom Holland himself implies in his comments on the translation of Suetonius’s *Lives of the Caesars*.

As proved many times, the same event can be reported very differently by witnesses who all saw the event take place. But can we please avoid the misleading phrases ‘the course of history was changed’, and ‘history changed’, and instead make it clear that our records and reports may be edited and perhaps made clearer – but history, in its common meaning as the events of the past, does not change.

We can say that ‘the recorded account has changed many times’, or ‘the course of events was changed’: for example, ‘Julius Caesar’s crossing of the Rubicon was to have long-lasting consequences’ – but it didn’t *change history*!

Diana Batho Clark, New Jersey

Culture club?

In April’s *Conversation*, [Royal Historical Society president] Lucy Noakes gives the impression that the ‘culture wars’ were imposed on academic historians.

SAVE WHEN YOU SUBSCRIBE TODAY
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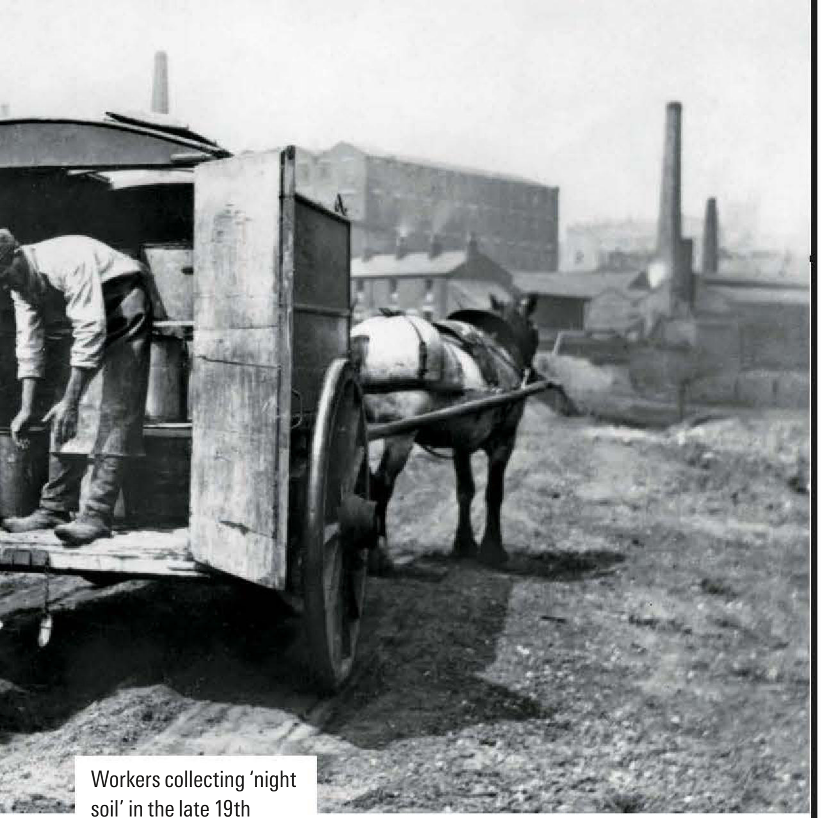

Workers collecting 'night soil' in the late 19th century. Reader Helen Briscoe points out that the task was still being carried out in some parts of Britain as late as the 1970s

This ignores the current groupthink shared by many funding bodies, academic departments and museum curators, which insists on interpreting history through the lens of gender and race, whether insightful or otherwise. It is disingenuous to downplay the role this has had in stoking the culture wars.
Robert Hewitt, Hertford

Cold callers

I write in response to your feature *How Britain Found its Frequency* (March) [about the impact of radios first appearing in British homes]. The reactions to the new technology reminded me of a telephone conversation I had in the early 1970s. The elderly woman with whom I spoke seemed to have a cold. I expressed my sympathies, and she replied "Yes, thank you, I *do* have a cold – I caught it the other day while talking on the phone. I know people say you can't catch a cold over the phone, but it's just happened to me." I remember later feeling grateful that I didn't catch a cold from her.
Allen Chase, Washington, United States

A classic landline telephone handset. Reader Allen Chase recalls fears that the technology could be a spreader of ill health

Further reading (and listening)

I would like to remind my fellow readers to use their subscription number to gain access to the *HistoryExtra* resources [see page 38 of this issue for more details]. I am a history teacher, and I have found so many useful resources such as podcasts and articles to help engage myself and others in history.

At my school, we are introducing a new series of lessons on the Mughals, comparing them to the Tudor dynasty, and I have found a number of interesting articles to help approach this topic. Babur is worth researching if you have a spare minute…
Matt Smith, Kent

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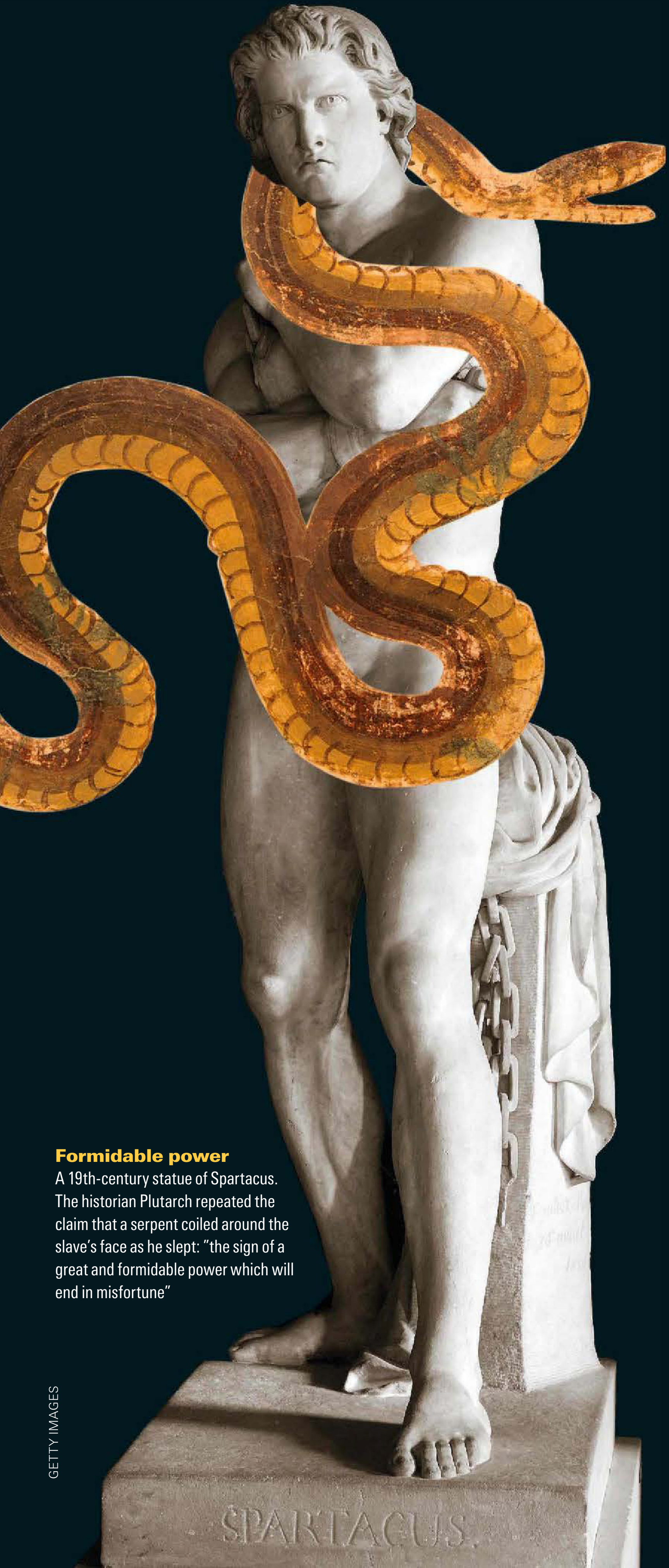
Rome's worst nightmare

When the Spartacus revolt erupted in 73 BC, it exposed a terrifying truth: that the cocksure Roman Republic was nowhere near as invincible as it liked to believe. **Guy de la Bédoyère** takes up the story



Formidable power
A 19th-century statue of Spartacus. The historian Plutarch repeated the claim that a serpent coiled around the slave's face as he slept: "the sign of a great and formidable power which will end in misfortune"

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It's a measure of the enduring appeal of Stanley Kubrick's 1960 swords-and-sandals epic that, when most of us hear the name Spartacus, a dimple-chinned Kirk Douglas springs immediately to mind. Heroic. Noble. Doomed. Roman citizens, it's safe to say, saw Spartacus rather differently – as a rebellious slave who threatened the future of the Roman Republic. Violent. Disobedient. Dangerous.

Though writing in the imperial Roman era long after the defeat of Spartacus, the words of the author Plutarch (AD 46–c120) capture something of the dread the warrior inspired. "It is said that, when he was first brought to Rome to be sold, a serpent was seen coiled about his face as he slept," noted Plutarch, "and his wife, who was of the same tribe as Spartacus, a prophetess, and subject to visitations of the Dionysiac frenzy, declared it the sign of a great and formidable power which would end in misfortune."

So what's the truth behind these very different legends? Why did Spartacus take up arms outside the gladiatorial arena? And why was the uprising he led – the third of the so-called Servile Wars, following rebellions in 135–132 BC and 104–c100 BC – perceived as being so threatening to Rome?

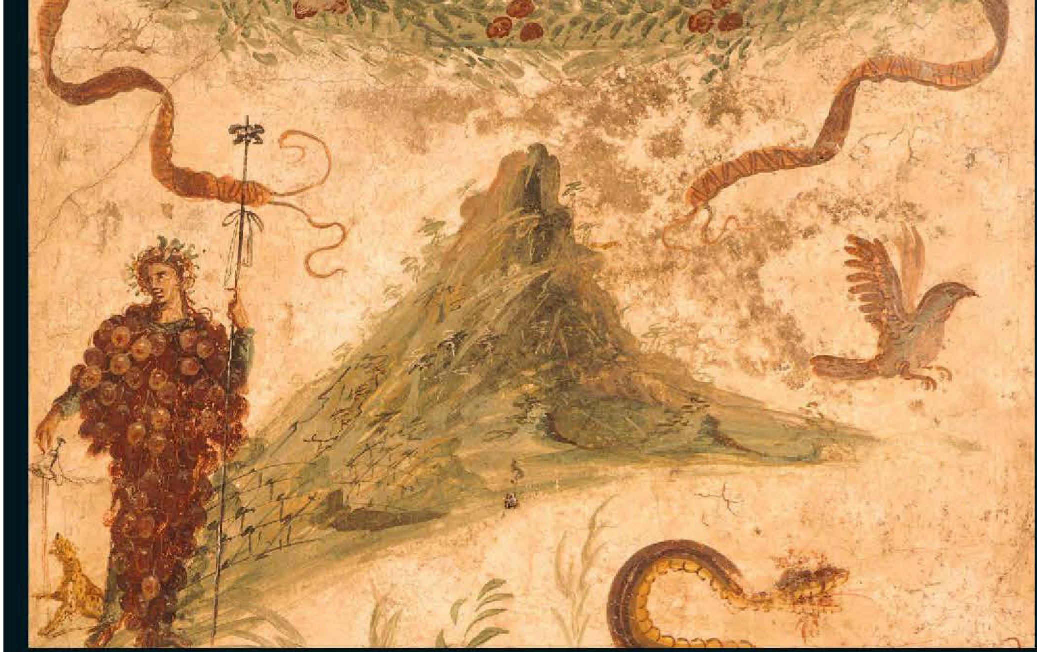
Brutal degradations

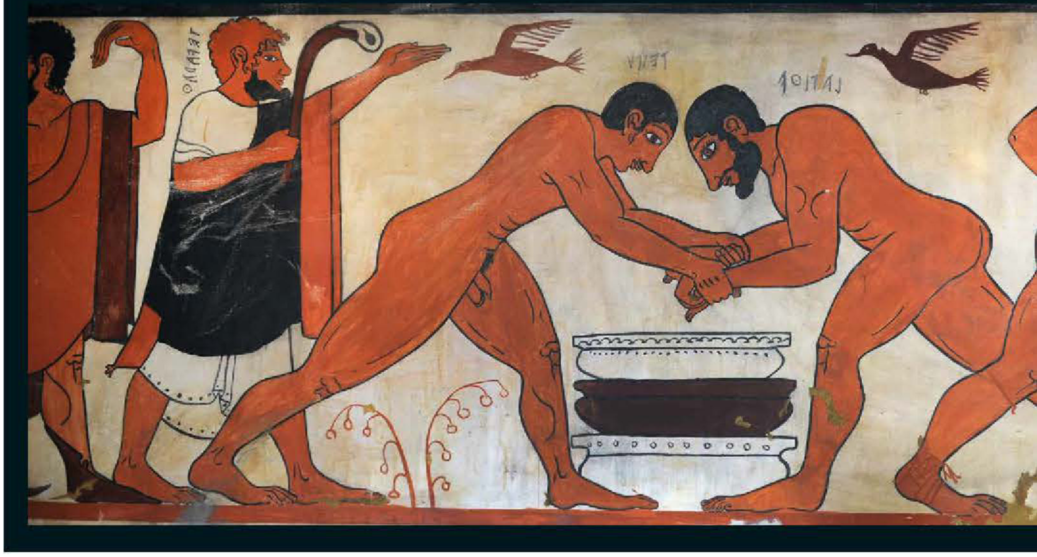
To answer these questions, it first helps to remember just how reliant upon slaves Rome had become by 73 BC, when the renegade band of trainee gladiators led by Spartacus burst out of their barracks in southern Italy. Their rebellion exposed the terrifying truth: that every city, every village and every villa estate was at risk from the slaves on whom every aspect of Roman life depended.

Paradoxically, this reliance on slave labour had grown from Rome's success. Having seen off the naval trading power of Carthage in three Punic Wars (264–241 BC, 218–201 BC and 149–146 BC), and having seized Greece in 146 BC, Rome had vastly increased its reach and territory. The Romans had also defeated Macedon and, in 133 BC, been granted the kingdom of Attalus III of Pergamon (spanning much of western Anatolia, now in Turkey) by the terms of his will.

Booty poured into Rome. In an era when slavery was ubiquitous, this included the trafficking of human beings – a practice Rome industrialised on an unimaginably vast scale. Its generals brought back hundreds of thousands of slaves – people who were sold in its markets and put to work on tasks that ranged from looking after wealthy men and women in fine homes to labouring on plantations. For some of the least fortunate, the brutal degradations of the mines awaited.

The streets of Rome heaved with slaves





scuttling about on the business of their masters and mistresses. Then there were the gladiators. This profession had grown out of a funerary custom of the Etruscans (the people of central Italy from whom the Romans borrowed many traditions) to evolve into a central component of crowd-pleasing Roman entertainment, funded by the elite as part of their political competitiveness.

Among those gladiators was Spartacus. Born in Thrace, an area in the south-eastern Balkans spanning parts of modern Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria, Spartacus had, according to one translation of the historian Appian (c95–c165 AD), "once served as a soldier with the Romans". Not unlike the fictional Maximus Decimus Meridius in Ridley Scott's 2000 blockbuster *Gladiator*, he had somehow been enslaved and eventually sold to a school run by the *lanista* (gladiator trainer) Lentulus Batiatus in Capua, southern Italy.

It seems that Spartacus's military training stood him in good stead when, outraged by Batiatus's treatment of his fighters, mostly Gauls and Thracians, he took part in a rebellion to overpower the training-school guards. Surviving accounts of the revolt written by Plutarch and Appian some 200 years later unsurprisingly don't quite tally – an all too common problem with ancient sources. Nevertheless, it seems that around 200 gladiators planned a breakout, and that 78 did manage to escape. Only then did they elect Spartacus as leader. He had a reputation for being unusually wise and cultured for someone of his background. He was also exceptionally courageous and strong.

Whatever the precise details of those events, the Third Servile (or Spartacus) War had begun. Spartacus and his rebels made for the nearby slopes of Vesuvius, and were joined by runaway slaves and even some free peasants. Any loot gathered along the way was shared out equally – an egalitarian gesture that attracted others. They defeated soldiers sent from Capua and helped themselves to their equipment, discarding their own less-effective gladiatorial weapons.

Around 140 years later, Pliny the Elder (c23-79 AD) recorded how Spartacus had allegedly forbidden any of his followers to possess gold or silver. Pliny interpreted this rule as showing that slaves in Rome's recent past had more moral fibre than Romans themselves.

Opportunity missed

At the start of the rebellion, few took Spartacus and his followers too seriously. Initially, the *praetor* (commander) Clodius was sent from Rome with 3,000 troops to trap the rebels on the volcano. The renegades, though, made ladders from vines and shinned down sheer cliffs to make their escape. Even then, arrogance and complacency prevailed in Rome, where no one appreciated quite how dangerous the revolt was becoming. Once more, only a scratch force was sent against Spartacus, who repeatedly beat off attacks. His army grew larger, stronger and better equipped day by day: with his military experience, Spartacus was able to oversee training and the manufacture of weapons.

Appian estimated the number of rebels at 70,000; however, such rounded figures are meaningless, especially when they involve Rome's enemies. Not only was there no way of accurately measuring the strength of armies but, by exaggerating the strength of opponents, Roman victories were given additional sheen – a powerful incentive to tell tall tales after the event.

Only belatedly was a proper consular army of two legions sent out by the Senate. In 72 BC, they defeated a force of '30,000' rebels led by another gladiator, the Gallic Crixus, killing "20,000" including Crixus himself.

According to Plutarch, this defeat made Spartacus more cautious. "Spartacus was soon great and formidable," he wrote, "but he took a proper view of the situation. Since he could not expect to overcome the Roman power, he began to lead his army toward the Alps, thinking it necessary for them to cross the mountains and go to their respective homes – some to Thrace and some to Gaul. But his men were now strong in numbers and full of confidence, and would not listen to him, but went ravaging over Italy."

Determined to pursue his escape plan, Spartacus persevered with his march north – but was cut off by one of the consuls (Rome's highest elected officials), while the other blocked his retreat. However, the consular army amounted to only about 10,000–12,000 men, so splitting them up was a mistake. Spartacus attacked each half of the Roman army in separate engagements: his force having now grown to (supposedly) 120,000, he defeated both, sending the consuls fleeing in separate directions.

Buoyed up, Spartacus headed towards Gaul, defeating the 10,000-strong army of the governor of Gallia Cisalpina (in the north of what's now Italy). Spartacus executed 300

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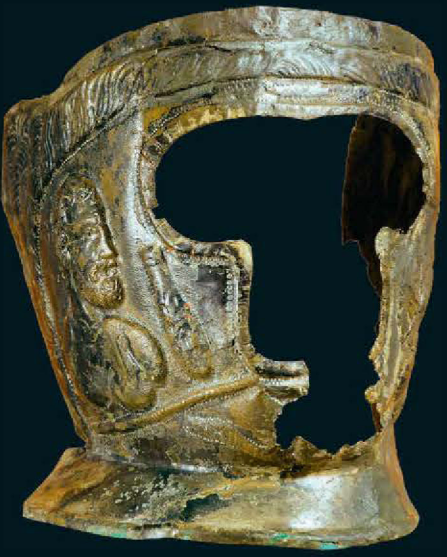
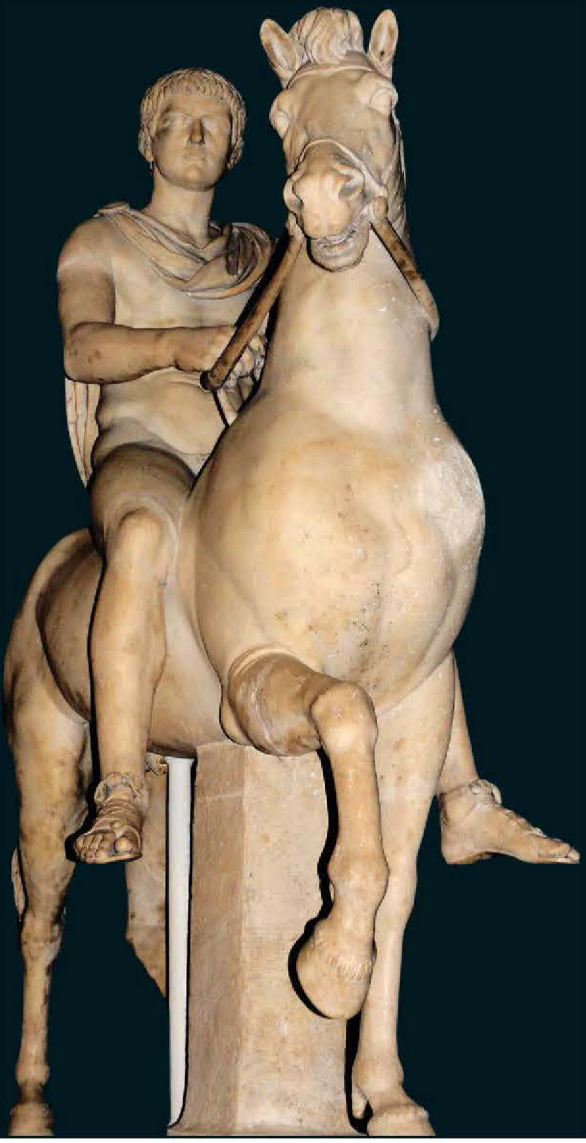
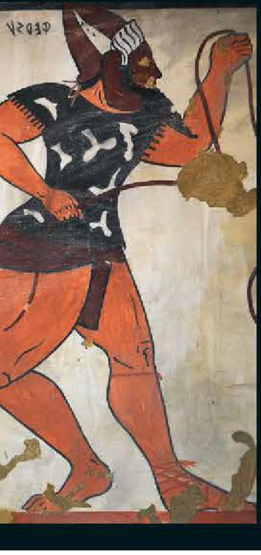
High stakes A Roman fresco depicting Bacchus, god of wine-making, next to what's often identified as Vesuvius. The mountain served as a rallying point for new recruits to Spartacus's cause in the early stages of his uprising



A head for fights
A Gallo-Roman gladiator's helmet from the first century BC. Gladiators were bought as slaves and schooled in combat by *lanistae* (trainers and managers of these fighters)



Horse latitude
A first-century AD statue of a youth on horseback. Before the pivotal battle, Spartacus reputedly killed his mount, declaring: "If I win this day, I shall have many fine horses from the enemy – but if I lose, I shall want none"



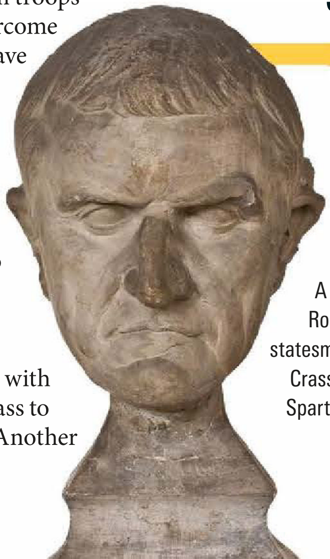
Funeral rites
Wrestlers in a sixth-century BC Etruscan tomb fresco near Tarquinia, central Italy. Roman gladiatorial games evolved from Etruscan funerary customs

Roman prisoners as a sacrifice in honour of Crixus. He then marched on Rome and – acting as brutally as his former Roman masters – killed all of his remaining prisoners and his pack animals so that he could move as quickly as possible. By now, the consuls had regrouped and together tried to block Spartacus. He defeated them again.

Terrifying humiliation

That highly trained Roman troops were being repeatedly overcome by an army led by an ex-slave was a devastating and terrifying humiliation for the Roman military. Spartacus, though, understood that his force, for all its size, lacked the equipment and training to take Rome. Instead, he captured the city of Thurii (on the Gulf of Taranto in southern Italy) and traded with merchants for iron and brass to manufacture more arms. Another victory over a Roman army followed.

Spartacus had a reputation for being unusually wise and cultured, exceptionally courageous and strong



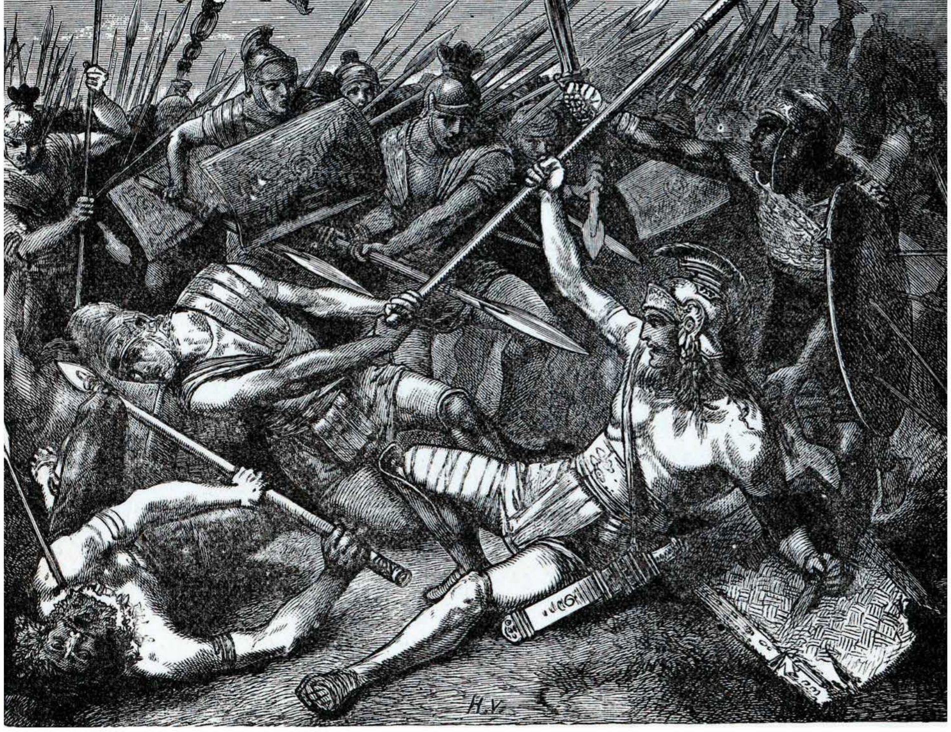
A cast of a mask of Roman general and statesman Marcus Licinius Crassus, who fought Spartacus in 71 BC

GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN

The Spartacus War was now in its third year, and the revolt represented an unmatched opportunity for any Roman general who could crush it. Rome had two great military leaders at the time. One was the fabulously wealthy Marcus Licinius Crassus (c115–53 BC), who had fought on the side of the dictator Sulla in the civil war of the 80s BC. The other was Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus (106–48 BC), commonly known as Pompey, who had recently crushed the rebellion of the senator Sertorius in Spain.

The Senate placed Crassus in charge of the war. Determined to win at all costs, and desperate to do so before Pompey was called upon to help, he raised an army of six legions and added the consular army of two legions – except those men he executed as punishment for their failure to defeat Spartacus previously.

In one ancient account of what followed, Crassus sent Mummius, one of his legates, with two of the legions to fight Spartacus. Mummius was defeated, and some of the survivors fled. Crassus regrouped them, but



Last stand Spartacus's death, imagined in a 19th-century engraving. The Roman historian Appian wrote that the rebel leader "was wounded in the knee... he and the great mass of those with him were surrounded and slain"

TOPFOTO

took the 500 most cowardly and decimated them – executing one in 10. Though brutal, his methods worked: facing 10,000 of Spartacus's men, who were encamped some way from the main force, Crassus's force killed two-thirds. With that victory under his belt, he led his men to rout the rest.

Spartacus's army fled south to the sea, hoping to cross to Sicily, but was thwarted when Cilician pirates, who had agreed to help him with sea transport, double-crossed the rebels. He and his men were now trapped in what's now Calabria, on the far south-western tip of Italy's toe.

Plutarch described how any chance of the rebels escaping from southern Italy was thwarted: "[Crassus] determined to build a wall across the isthmus, thereby at once keeping his soldiers from idleness, and his enemies from provisions. The task was a huge one and difficult, but he accomplished and finished it, contrary to all expectations, in a short time, running a ditch from sea to sea through the neck of land 300 furlongs [about 37 miles] in length and 15 [Roman] feet [about 4.4 metres] in width and depth alike. Above the ditch he also built a wall of astonishing height and strength."

Whatever the justice of his cause, we should be under no illusions about Spartacus's capacity for brutality. According to Appian, "He crucified a Roman prisoner in the space between the two armies to show his own men what fate awaited them if they did not conquer."

Spartacus ignored the fortifications for a while but, as his food supplies dwindled, he was forced to break out with some of his men – and Crassus became worried that Spartacus might now decide to march on Rome.

The events that followed are confused in the accounts, and difficult to follow. However, it seems that, though Spartacus suffered the defection of some of his army, he enjoyed some success, too.

The last battle

Back in Rome, concern that the siege might drag on even longer drove the Senate to invite Pompey and his army, recently returned from Spain, to head south and help defeat Spartacus. This infuriated Crassus, who believed that Pompey would take all the glory from such a victory, and was desperate to fight Spartacus before his rival arrived. So when the rebel leader tried to negotiate terms with Crassus, the Roman bluntly refused.

Nevertheless, Crassus seemed to have lost his chance of glory when Spartacus escaped and headed for Brundisium (now Brindisi) on the Adriatic coast in another attempt to flee by sea. The rebel leader, though, abandoned that plan when he heard that Lucullus, proconsul (governor) of Macedonia, had arrived back in Brundisium after defeating supporters of Mithridates, king of Pontus.

Crucially, at that point Spartacus defeated a force sent against him under the command of Quintus, one of Crassus's officers. Until then, Spartacus had kept his head – but now "this success turned out to be the undoing of Spartacus, because it filled his slaves with overconfidence", said Plutarch. Those rebels attacked the Roman soldiers as they were digging fortifications, and that confrontation forced Spartacus into preparing for a full-blown showdown with Crassus.

The story goes that Spartacus was brought his horse, ready to carry him into battle – but instead he pulled out his sword and killed it, saying that if he won this day, he would have many fine horses from the enemy – but if he lost, he would want none.

Despite the risks they faced in the arena, gladiators could become popular heroes and celebrated heartthrobs

The Roman and rebel armies finally met in open conflict in the clash that became known as the battle of the Silarius River – where, Plutarch and Appian affirm, Spartacus died on the field. Appian wrote that the renegade's body was never found, but that he "was wounded in the knee, holding his shield in front of him and contending this way against his assailants until he and the great mass of those with him were surrounded and slain".

Revenge and recrimination

The Romans fell on the remainder of Spartacus's men, who were now floundering around in leaderless confusion. Crassus had won, but Pompey rolled up in time for his men to cut down the surviving rebels as they tried to escape. Some fled into the mountains, and Crassus pursued them.

According to Appian, the last 6,000 fugitives were captured and crucified by Crassus along the Via Appia between Capua and Rome. Pompey, though, claimed that it was he who, by mopping up the vestiges of the rebel forces, had brought the war to an end.

The following year, 70 BC, the two men were joint consuls – but disagreed on almost everything. Even worse for Crassus, Pompey was able to hold a magnificent triumph in Rome to celebrate his defeat of Sertorius in Spain, while Crassus was too ashamed to hold one for merely winning a slave war.

The Third Servile War had put Rome in a precarious position. Spartacus had dented the military prestige won by Rome over several centuries of expansion, and made a mockery of the military system that the Greek historian Polybius, writing in his *Histories*, had so feted only 80 years earlier.

The Roman historian Florus, writing

A slave to the truth?

How accurate is Kubrick's 1960 blockbuster, *Spartacus*?

Kirk Douglas (centre) portrays the rebel gladiator Spartacus in Stanley Kubrick's 1960 movie – which was more historically accurate than you might expect

It's one of the most famous films of the 20th century. When the Stanley Kubrick-directed *Spartacus* was released in 1960, its scale and ambition caught the imagination of cinema-goers everywhere. But how true to real events is it?

The answer is: more than you might think. The central narrative in the film is the conflict between Spartacus (Kirk Douglas) and Crassus (Laurence Olivier), reflecting historical accounts. In the movie, Crassus encounters Spartacus while watching a private bout at Batiatus's gladiator training school, though is unaware of his identity. In fact, it seems that Crassus never knowingly saw Spartacus in real life.

Pompey does not appear in the film, though is mentioned. The success of the rebels' breakout and defeat of Roman armies is essentially accurate, as is Spartacus being wrong-footed by the duplicity of the Cilician pirates.

The brilliant Peter Ustinov played the real *lanista* Batiatus, shamelessly stealing every scene in which he appeared. Who could forget his pompous arrival with his entourage in search of new gladiators, spying a bedraggled Spartacus being punished for hamstringing a guard? "Hamstrung? How marvellous," he says, "I wish I'd been here! I'll take him."

Some key characters in the film are fictitious, including Spartacus's ex-slave wife from the gladiator barracks, Varinia (Jean Simmons), and Crassus's slave Antoninus (Tony Curtis), who joins the revolt. In fact, Spartacus's wife, name unknown, was said to have been Thracian.

The screenplay did capture vividly the notion of Rome as a living force beyond the insignificance of human beings. As Crassus, Olivier proclaims that Rome, "that bestrides the known world like a colossus", cannot be withstood by any man. The city must be served, and all must abase themselves and grovel before Rome, he declares: "You must love her."

The final, celebrated "I'm Spartacus" scene, in which every one of the surviving rebels stands up to claim to be the eponymous hero, is of course pure movie make-believe. The mass execution along the Appian Way was not – this was Rome's way of deterring any slaves from attempting such a venture in future.

In the movie, Varinia shows the dying Spartacus his son, promising that the boy would grow up in liberty: "He is free Spartacus, free." Yet slavery lasted as long as the Roman empire and beyond.

almost two centuries later, summed up Roman disgust at what had happened: "I know not what name to give to the war which was stirred up at the instigation of Spartacus, for the common soldiers being slaves and their leaders being gladiators … added insult to injury which they inflicted upon Rome."

Never again?

Considering the damage to Rome's prestige, one of the most remarkable aspects of the Spartacus War is that there was no repeat in later years. This certainly wasn't because Rome changed its stance on slaves: untold numbers continued to be acquired in, for example, Caesar's Gallic Wars.

This reliance on slaves had a profound impact on Roman society. Under the emperors from Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) onwards, historians habitually bemoaned how wealth and power were turning the Romans into feeble, luxury-loving layabouts. With slaves on hand to do almost everything for them – carrying them in litters, cooking, labouring, flapping away flies and even telling them the time – Romans who could afford these unpaid servants were, it was said, no equals of their ancestors, hardy farmers and soldiers.

Perhaps one of the reasons nothing like the Spartacus rebellion happened again was because the Romans, once the bloodshed and retribution were over, managed to find a way to give slaves a form of hope. The Romans were as barbaric as any other ancient civilisation – more so, in terms of the sheer scale of their dominance – but there was one crucial difference: they were endlessly pragmatic and adaptable.

Not only did the Romans develop a system of manumission, giving slaves the opportunity to gain their liberty, but freedmen and freedwomen were able to run businesses, accumulate savings and see their children grow up not just free but eligible to vote and hold office. That did nothing to overturn the cruelty and injustice of slavery, but the tombstones of freedmen and freedwomen in the cemeteries of Rome, the port at Ostia and at Pompeii bear witness to the lives that some of the more successful built for themselves. It was certainly better than risking crucifixion along the Appian Way by rebelling.

Despite the risks they faced in the arena, gladiators, too, could become popular heroes and celebrated heartthrobs – they might even be freed, some becoming wealthy along the way. The truth, of course, was that most of them ended up dead or disabled long before that happened, but the fact is that there was no second Spartacus, nor anyone like him. No gladiator-led slave rebellion ever threatened Rome's existence again.

Guy de la Bédoyère is a historian and broadcaster. His latest book is *Populus: Living and Dying in the Wealth, Smoke and Din of Ancient Rome* (Abacus, 2024)

Listen to Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss Spartacus on an episode of **In Our Time** at *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03wq2p3*

ALAMY

“These women transformed his understanding of the world”

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: **“Queen Mother” Audley Moore; Malcolm X; and Malcolm’s wife, Betty. Women had a profound impact on the civil rights leader’s ideological journey**

Malcolm X became one of the most influential leaders in the US civil rights movement – thanks largely, explains **Ashley D Farmer**, to the women who shaped his life and ideas

On a balmy spring evening in Omaha, Nebraska, Louise Little answered a knock at the door. She must have been terrified when she opened it and saw several knights of the Ku Klux Klan on horseback, demanding that she produce her husband at once. Louise knew she was in trouble. She was all alone save her three children – Wilfred, Hilda, and Philbert – and pregnant with her fourth child, Malcolm. But as the Klansmen brandished their guns, Louise stood her ground. She refused to let them see fear in her eyes or tell them her husband's whereabouts.

In the end, the men left with a threat on their lips as they rode off into the night. Such moments were par for the course for Louise Little, the first of many black women who taught, mentored and shaped the man now known as Malcolm X.

Malcolm was born 100 years ago – on 19 May 1925, in Omaha. He was Grenadian-born Louise and Georgia-born Earl Little's fourth child together. It is easy to see why Earl was smitten with Malcolm's mother: Louise had travelled extensively, she spoke multiple languages and she was politically engaged.

Malcolm's parents met in Montreal, Canada at a gathering of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). A black nationalist from Jamaica, Garvey captured the black masses with his calls for race pride, and the right for black people all over the world to control their communities and determine their futures. The pair married in 1919, relocated briefly to Philadelphia and then moved to Omaha. By the time Malcolm was born, the Littles were well-known nationalist organisers in the area. Earl was the president of the local chapter of the UNIA, while Louise served as its secretary, managing memberships and writing for the UNIA's newspaper, *The Negro World*.

Childhood tragedies

The couple worked hard to survive during Jim Crow – the state-sponsored racial caste system that deployed disenfranchisement, racial violence and segregation laws to make black people second-class citizens in almost every walk of life. Louise and Earl raised their children as Garveyites, eventually moving to Lansing, Michigan in search of a better life and a bigger black nationalist community.

Family time

Malcolm with his half-sister Ella Collins, whom he described as "the first ever really proud black woman I had ever seen"

Life came to a screeching halt for six-year-old Malcolm when his father, Earl, announced he was going into town on 29 September 1931. It wasn't uncommon for Earl to go out like this, but this time Louise had a gnawing feeling that white supremacists were gunning for her husband more than usual. She begged him not to go. But Earl wouldn't listen. Later that night, Lansing police confirmed her fears. Earl was dead. The officers claimed that Earl had slipped and fallen on the tracks and a streetcar had run him over. But Malcolm claimed the KKK was at fault. They had long wanted his nationalist father dead.

Whatever the cause of Earl's death, Louise was now left to raise their seven children alone. She got by, at first, by following Garvey's ideals. Grieving as she was, Malcolm's mother read to him from *The Negro World*, modelled black economic independence by shopping at black-owned businesses, and fostered his interest in the global black diaspora. Louise Little was Malcolm's earliest teacher and laid the foundation for him to become one of the greatest black nationalist leaders of the 20th century.

Malcolm's mother modelled black economic independence by shopping at black-owned businesses

But Louise's life lessons were cut short. Years into the Great Depression, and with too many children to feed, Malcolm's mother started to fall apart. In December 1939, doctors declared Louise insane and sent her to a mental hospital in Kalamazoo. The state placed the Little children in foster care and sent Malcolm to a juvenile home in the mostly white town of Mason, Michigan. By his own account, Malcolm thrived there, earning good grades and integrating into his school community. But a chance encounter with his half-sister, Ella Collins, changed the trajectory of his life.

Inspirational sister

Ella, who was one of Earl's children from his first marriage, visited Malcolm and her other half-siblings when he was a young teen. Malcolm was impressed. "[Ella was] the first really proud black woman I had ever seen," he recalled in his autobiography. "Ella wasn't just black, but like our father she was jet black. The way she sat, moved, talked, did

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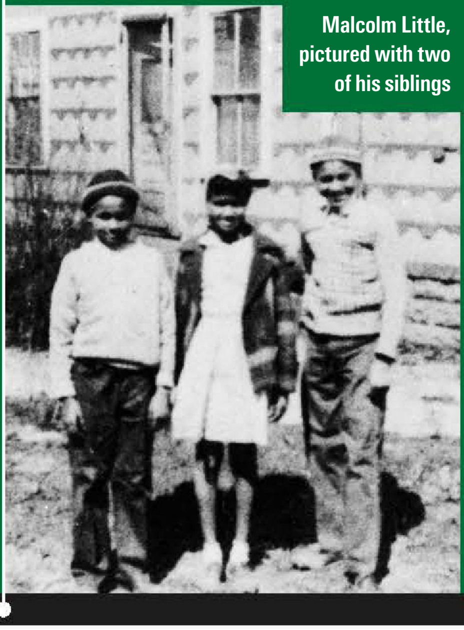
TIMELINE
BECOMING X

10 key milestones in the life of the influential US black nationalist

19 May 1925

Malcolm Little is born in Omaha, Nebraska, the fourth child of Grenada-born Louise and Georgia-born Earl


Malcolm Little, pictured with two of his siblings

A 1930s Ku Klux Klan gathering in Georgia

29 September 1931

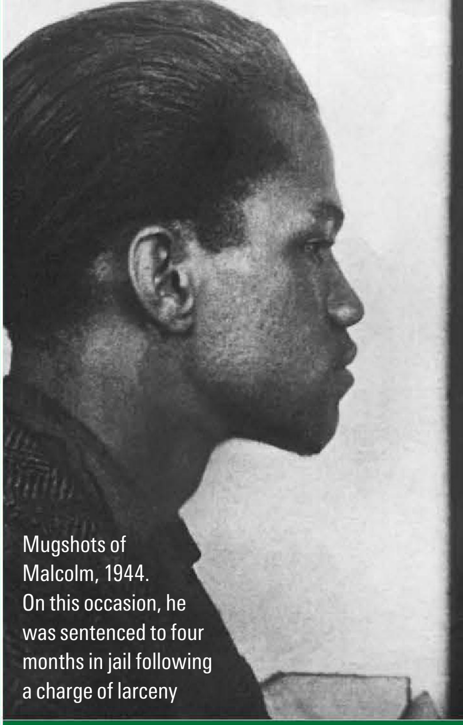
Malcolm's father, Earl, dies after being hit by a streetcar in Lansing, Michigan. Malcolm comes to believe that white supremacists were responsible

December 1939

After years of hardship raising seven children alone, **Malcolm's mother, Louise, is sent to a psychiatric hospital.** The children are placed in foster care

1941

Malcolm is adopted by his half-sister Ella Collins, and moves to Roxbury, a black neighbourhood in Boston, to live with her family


Mugshots of Malcolm, 1944. On this occasion, he was sentenced to four months in jail following a charge of larceny

1946

Malcolm begins a 10-year sentence for burglary at Charlestown State Prison in Boston. There, he resumes his education and devours a range of books, opening his mind to ideas of black nationalism

everything, bespoke of somebody who did and got exactly what she wanted."

Ella and her husband, Kenneth Collins, adopted Malcolm when he was 15 years old, and welcomed him into their home in Roxbury, the black part of Boston. "No physical move in my life," Malcolm noted of his relocation in 1941, was "more pivotal or profound in its repercussions. All praise is due to Allah that I went to Boston when I did." For better or worse, the move opened up a whole new world for Malcolm. Ella did her best to keep Malcolm on the straight and narrow, but the city life was too much of a draw. It didn't take long for him to join up with the wrong crowd. Malcolm, or 'Detroit Red' as he was known on Roxbury's streets, became part of a five-person larceny ring that plundered its way through jewellery stores and pawn shops across the city. After several close calls, the police finally nabbed the quartet.

His sisters were Malcolm's steadying force while he was behind bars. Ella was one of Malcolm's first and only visitors at the Charlestown State Prison in 1946, where the 20-year-old started his 10-year sentence for burglary. But it was his older sister, Hilda, who prompted the despondent Malcolm to change course. Frustrated, if not embarrassed, by his turn toward crime, Hilda suggested that Malcolm clean up his act while behind bars. He could start by improving his grammar and reading comprehension, she suggested, since letter writing was his only real connection with the outside world.

Malcolm's sister Ella did her best to keep him on the straight and narrow, but he joined up with the wrong crowd

"I did begin a correspondence course in English," Malcolm recalled after Hilda admonished him. This became the gateway to the world of books. Soon Malcolm started devouring any publication he could get his hands on behind bars, everything from Shakespeare to Asian history. Because of his sister's prompting, Malcolm Little was on his way to becoming one of the foremost thinkers of the 20th century.

Perusing books on all sorts of subjects helped open Malcolm's mind to the Nation of Islam (NOI). While Malcolm was in prison, Ella, along with his older brothers, Wilfred and Philbert, joined the religious organisation that Wallace Fard Muhammad had started in 1930 in Detroit. By the time they joined the Nation, it had a new leader: Elijah Muhammad. Nevertheless, its goals were the same: to "teach the downtrodden and defenceless black people a thorough knowledge of God and of themselves", worship Allah, and support black nationalist principles such as black political and economic independence. The NOI made sense to Malcolm – who recognised the echoes of Garveyism in the group's message. By the time he got out of prison in August 1952, he had joined the NOI and changed his name to Malcolm X.

Marriage and family

Four years later, Malcolm found a life companion in another Nation follower. Betty Dean Sanders grew up in Detroit and attended the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama before relocating to New York to study nursing at Brooklyn State College. At the urging of other

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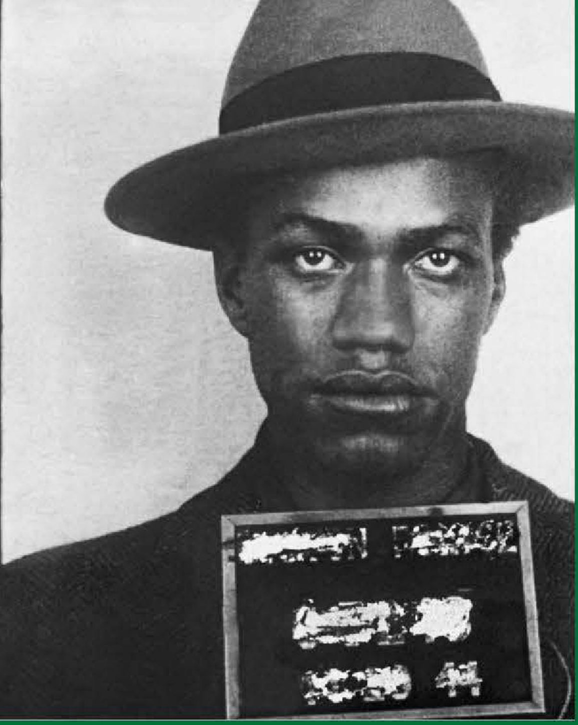
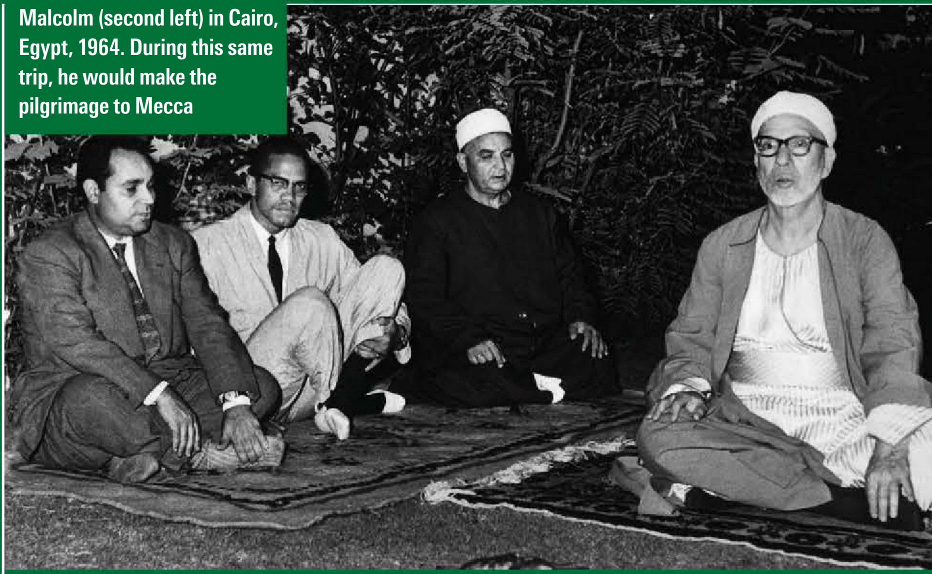


Malcolm (second left) in Cairo, Egypt, 1964. During this same trip, he would make the pilgrimage to Mecca



August 1952
Malcolm is released from prison. Having joined the Nation of Islam, **the 27-year-old changes his name to Malcolm X**

14 January 1958
Malcolm marries 22-year-old nurse Betty Dean Sanders. Alongside raising their six daughters, she nurtures and shapes her husband's career: speaking, writing and advocating for black nationalism

April 1964
After becoming disillusioned with the Nation of Islam's leader, **Malcolm travels to Africa and the Middle East**, completing his Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) and taking the name El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz

28 June 1964
Having met Ghana's first postcolonial leader, Kwame Nkrumah, **Malcolm founds the secular Organization of Afro-American Unity** (OAAU). He aims to attract more members, including women, by adopting a broader approach

21 February 1965
Preparing to address OAAU members at the Audubon Ballroom in Washington Heights, New York City, **Malcolm X is shot dead by an assassin** angry at his criticism of the Nation of Islam and its leader

nursing students, Betty began attending NOI meetings. She was hesitant at first. Betty had grown up in a loving household that valued women's independence and the Christian faith. How could she convert to Islam and live by its mandates – everything from its strict dietary restrictions to its conservative gender roles? Yet Nation leaders' analysis of race relations resonated with the 22-year-old girl who had been to the Deep South and witnessed Jim Crow first-hand. Betty converted in 1956 and married Malcolm X on 14 January 1958, the same day that she received her nursing licence.

Betty X, as she was now known, had more formal education than most in her NOI circles. She wanted to work, but Malcolm, who at the time mostly thought of women as helpmates to men, forbade it. So Betty asserted her know-how in other ways. To be sure, she worked hard to raise their six daughters, but she also helped to facilitate Malcolm's career. When she wasn't answering phones and managing his schedule, Betty hosted movement luminaries at the couple's home and offered her opinion on everything from US race relations to world events. After their guests left and Malcolm laid his head down at night, he discussed the movement and his role in it with her. She offered insights and softly steered him as he navigated the turbulent waters of the early 1960s.

With Betty by his side, Malcolm became one of the most influential people in the country. He kept up a gruelling schedule, speaking on college campuses and at mosques across the country, sparring with white leaders and journalists, and mobilising Nation members whenever police or politicians attacked one of their own. No matter their political affiliation, activists across the black freedom movement had to concede that Malcolm was one of their biggest and brightest stars. But many wanted to see him stretch politically, to move beyond the Nation of Islam.

Movement leaders such as Audley Moore said as much. Moore met Malcolm at an open-air meeting in Harlem in the 1950s. He immediately captivated her with his ability to rouse crowds to black nationalist action, something she hadn't seen since she had come face-to-face with Garvey in the 1920s. Captivated by Garvey's message, a 25-year-old Moore had joined the UNIA then and there, and

Man on the move
Malcolm with his daughter Ilyasah after returning from a tour of the Middle East, 1964

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The women who shaped Malcolm X

"Queen Mother" Audley Moore arrives in Nigeria for the World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, 1977

Shirley Graham (right), civil rights leader and the wife of WEB Du Bois, and the writer Maya Angelou (above) helped to transform Malcolm X's understanding of the world during his trip to Africa in 1964

spent the next seven decades building the black nationalist movement in America. So influential was she in shaping modern black nationalism that Moore became known as the "Queen Mother" of the movement and activists came to her house to learn at her feet.

Malcolm was one of them. In the early 1960s, Moore's West Philadelphia home served as a nationalist training ground of sorts – a place where young and old organisers alike came to seek her counsel. Malcolm stopped in when he was in town and Moore jumped at the chance to shape his thinking. She wanted him to embrace the movement for reparations for black Americans that she began in the 1950s and to adopt a more global approach to black liberation – one that included the struggles that African countries were waging against their colonial oppressors.

It didn't take long for Moore to see her influence in his public remarks. "If I take the wages of everyone here, individually it means nothing," Malcolm told an audience at Michigan State University in 1963. "But collectively all of the earning power or wages that you earned in one week would make me wealthy. And if I could collect it for a year, I'd be rich beyond dreams." Magnify that by the millions of black people whose wealth and wages had been stolen for centuries, and "You'll see how this country got so rich so fast," he continued, laying the groundwork for his audience to understand the argument for reparations.

Still, Malcolm tried to remain a dutiful follower of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation. But he couldn't ignore the rumours. Word on the street was that the NOI leader had fathered several children out of wedlock – a sin in the eyes of the Nation. Malcolm felt betrayed by his mentor. If this were not enough, after Malcolm brazenly remarked that John F Kennedy's November 1963 assassination was a case of "the chickens coming home to roost", Muhammad silenced him. By early 1964, it was time for Malcolm to part ways both with his beloved leader and the organisation that shaped him.

Black women stepped in to fill the void. In April 1964, Malcolm left for a five-week trip that his sister Ella funded, during which he visited Africa and the Middle East, and made the pilgrimage to Mecca. It transformed Malcolm's life. He gained a new understanding of Islam outside of the Nation and a new sense of self. He changed his name to El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz.

Globetrotting exchanges

While abroad, Malcolm stopped in Ghana. The west African country had gained its independence from Britain in 1957 and its president, Kwame Nkrumah, welcomed black Americans to the country. Several black women – including writer Maya Angelou, long-time labour organiser Vicki Garvin, and WEB Du Bois' wife, Shirley Graham – who were temporarily residing there formed the 'Malcolm X Committee' to welcome the activist. Committee members planned dinners to discuss foreign policy, introduced Malcolm to Nkrumah, and facilitated conversations between Malcolm and diplomats from around the world. These women transformed his understanding of the world and their place in it. When he proclaimed that "the most disrespected person in America is the black woman" that same year, he based these claims not only on his time with Betty but also on his conversations with these women.

These black female activists also helped Malcolm conclude that the "single worst mistake of the American black organisations and their leaders" was that they "failed to establish direct brotherhood lines of communication" with independent black nations. Malcolm vowed to right this wrong when he returned to the US by creating the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU).

Malcolm, as most still knew him, modelled the OAAU after the Organisation of African Unity, a conglomeration of African nations founded in 1963 to develop a unified voice and agenda for the continent. His version would align the millions of black Americans with African nations to foster global black liberation. However, he had trouble getting the OAAU off the ground.

Days before he was set to debut the organisation, Malcolm wrote to Sara Mitchell, a young woman he had met amid his Harlem organising. He asked her to come to the meeting and offer her "objective analysis of [her] impressions of what we are trying to do, including [her] suggestions as to how we can do better". Mitchell obliged, offering such

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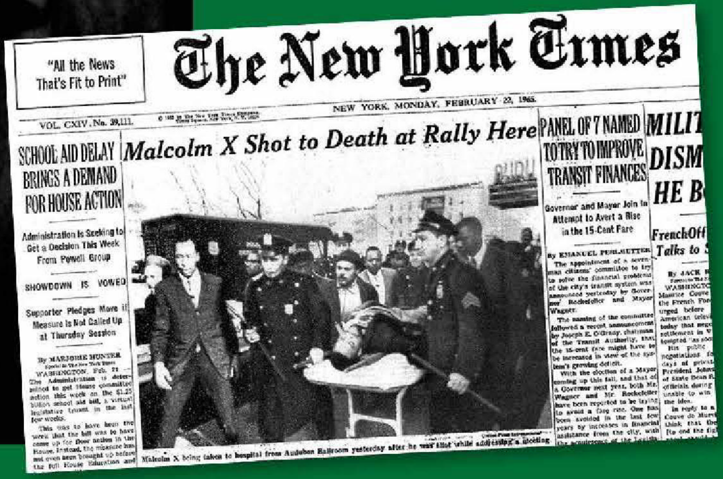
LEFT: **Malcolm X with Martin Luther King, whom he was often compared with** BELOW: **Malcolm's killing in February 1965 made headlines across America**



"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

VOL. CXIV. No. 39,111.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1965.

SCHOOL AID DELAY BRINGS A DEMAND FOR HOUSE ACTION

Administration Is Seeking to Get a Decision This Week From Powell Group

SHOWDOWN IS VOWED

Supporter Pledges Move if Measure Is Not Called Up at Thursday Session

By MARJORIE HUNTER

Malcolm X Shot to Death at Rally Here

Malcolm X being taken to hospital from Audubon Ballroom yesterday after he was shot while addressing a meeting

PANEL OF 7 NAMED TO TRY TO IMPROVE TRANSIT FINANCES

Governor and Mayor Join in Attempt to Avert a Rise in the 15-Cent Fare

By EMANUEL PERLMUTTER

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French Off

Talks to

trenchant analysis that Malcolm invited her to help write the aims and objectives of the organisation and develop its inner workings.

Mitchell shaped the scope and substance of the group, calling on Malcolm to abandon the tagline "By any means necessary" and instead to adopt a broader one, "Independence, Justice, and Prosperity", in order to bring more people into the group. Other capable women, such as longtime organiser Lynne Shifflett, served as the OAAU's executive secretary. Jazz singer Abbey Lincoln joined as the provisional director of the organisation.

Public assassination

After some organisational retooling, Malcolm planned to address these women and other members of the OAAU on 21 February 1965 in Harlem's Audubon Ballroom. Yet no sooner had he stepped onto the stage than NOI members gunned him down in front of a pregnant Betty and three of his four daughters. Betty and Ella tried to carry on the organisation in the aftermath, with an office filled with women running its daily operations. But it floundered without its leader.

Though short-lived, the OAAU exemplified Malcolm's political values on all fronts. His undying pursuit of black freedom; his ability to evolve in his thinking about how to achieve this; and his understanding that black women were vital to the cause.

Yet this is not the Malcolm most remember. Most conjure up soundbites of him throwing the second punch as it were: his labelling of the white man as "the devil" and his support of "violence in self-defence". Further juxtaposed to Dr Martin Luther King Jr, these and other quips helped the press and popular culture frame Malcolm as a radical and hateful man. Malcolm also said: "Dr King wants the same thing I want. Freedom." Despite this, even today, many see him as King's and the civil rights movement's 'evil twin'.

Lost in this legacy is the fact that white supremacists threw the first punch. Throughout his short life, Malcolm witnessed the black folks around him endure extreme vigilante violence, irrepressible racism and seemingly endless sexism. His goal was to try to offer them another viable path to freedom beyond integration. On the 100th anniversary of his birth and the 60th anniversary of his death, it is just as important to remember that this is the true legacy of Malcolm X – as well as the many female teachers, mentors, lovers and friends who helped make it possible. H

Throughout his short life, Malcolm witnessed the black folks around him endure violence, racism and sexism

Singing out

The jazz singer and songwriter Abbey Lincoln, pictured here in concert in 1966, was a key figure in the Organization of Afro-American Unity

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Ashley D Farmer is an associate professor in the Departments of History & African and African Diaspora Studies at the University of Texas at Austin

In this episode of BBC World Service's **Witness History**, a supporter of Malcolm X recalls the day the civil rights leader was assassinated: *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p00dy3yb*

BBC WORLD SERVICE

GETTY IMAGES/TOPFOTO

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

What was Benjamin Franklin's glass armonica?

⋙ "Of all my inventions, the glass armonica has given me the greatest personal satisfaction." That was quite the claim by the American polymath and founding father Benjamin Franklin, whose long list of inventions also includes the lightning rod, an innovative type of stove and bifocal spectacles. He developed the armonica – named for the Italian word 'armonia', meaning 'harmony' – as a musical instrument that could duplicate the high-pitched, almost ethereal, ringing noise of rubbing a finger around the top of a wine glass.

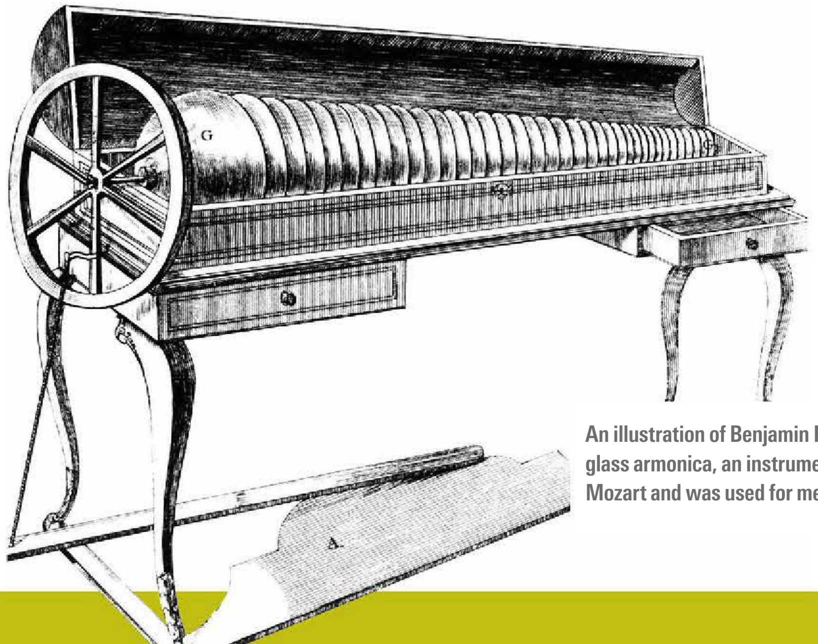
Invented in 1761, it comprised 37 glass bowls of graduated sizes and thicknesses lined up in an overlapping horizontal stack on a rotating spindle. The player turned them all at once with a foot pedal, while rubbing their fingers against the rims of the desired bowls to make them 'sing'. The bowls did not need liquid inside since they had been made, by London-based glassblower Charles James, to precise specifications so that each produced a different note.

Franklin adored the "incomparably sweet" tones of the armonica and would always travel with the instrument to play at his leisure. In the years after its premiere in 1762, it became a favourite of many musicians and composers across Europe, such as Mozart, who wrote an *Adagio and Rondo* for the instrument. Other composers who wrote for it include Beethoven and Saint-Saëns.

Yet the instrument's impact had consequences Franklin could not have anticipated, as questions were raised over whether its eerie sounds affected people's health. There was a widespread belief that the high-pitch humming could bring about madness. One German periodical claimed that the armonica "excessively stimulates the nerves, plunges the player into a nagging depression and hence into a dark and melancholy mood, that is an apt method for slow self-annihilation".

Nevertheless, German physician Franz Mesmer developed a therapeutic medical treatment akin to hypnotism – his name is where 'mesmeric' comes from – that utilised the armonica to create a suggestible, near-spiritual atmosphere for his patients. Coincidentally, when Mesmer was investigated by a royal commission appointed by King Louis XVI (which found that mesmerism had no scientific or medical basis), among the panel members was Franklin, who was serving as the US ambassador.

Jonny Wilkes, freelance writer



An illustration of Benjamin Franklin's glass armonica, an instrument that beguiled Mozart and was used for mesmerism

Dancers in a scene from Tchaikovsky's iconic ballet *Swan Lake* at the Bolshoi Theatre in Soviet Russia in 1974

Why did the Soviet Union use Swan Lake during moments of crisis?

⋙ Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's ballet *Swan Lake* had an inauspicious start – being critically panned after its premiere in 1877. But once its popularity started to spread around the world in the early 20th century, the Russians fiercely protected it as an icon of their culture. Such was its status that under the Soviet Union, the authorities hoped it would have a calming influence at times of crisis.

After the death of Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1982, state television replaced the scheduled programming with a recording of the ballet on a loop, while the process of selecting a successor was done. The same thing happened with the deaths of the leaders Yuri Andropov in 1984 and Konstantin Chernenko in 1985. In 1991, when communist hardliners launched a coup against Mikhail Gorbachev, televisions once again broadcast *Swan Lake* rather than the chaotic scenes.

Today, however, the meaning of *Swan Lake* has been transformed in Russia from a tool of the state into a symbol of protest; in particular, the image of the famous Dance of the Cygnets is used to oppose the invasion of Ukraine. ***JW***

TOPFOTO/ALAMY

A woman working in the Plant Institute in St Petersburg, a pioneering seed bank set up by botanist Nikolai Vavilov (inset) in 1921. Fiercely protected by its staff, the seed bank survived the brutal Siege of Leningrad in the 1940s

What was the Plant Institute?

››› In March 1921, the botanist and explorer Nikolai Vavilov came to the Russian city of Petrograd – now St Petersburg – to establish a seed bank known as the Plant Institute. Situated in a former palace on St Isaac's Square, its mission was revolutionary: to collect, study, and preserve plant genetic material from across the globe. The idea of a seed bank was novel, and its long-term value yet to be fully understood. Some viewed Vavilov's project as an eccentric waste of time and money. But by 1933, Vavilov and his team had collected at least 148,000 live seeds and tubers, and the bank had become world-famous.

Vavilov's scientific brilliance and openness to international collaboration brought him prestige abroad but made him suspect in Stalin's Soviet Union. During a collecting expedition in 1940 the NKVD (the Soviet secret police agency) arrested Vavilov, who was then falsely accused of spying for the British and sentenced to death (he ultimately died in prison in 1943), leaving the institute in the care of his colleagues.

These men and women were tested in the extreme when, a year later, Nazi troops surrounded Leningrad (Petrograd had been renamed in 1924), in what would become the longest siege in history, one that would claim the lives of approximately 750,000 people. Food soon became desperately scarce inside the city – residents were forced to trade valuables for bread, and eventually to eat their pets, including Pavlov's famous dogs – yet the scientists of the Plant Institute made a collective decision not to consume any part of their invaluable collection. Instead, they guarded it night and day, defended it from air raids (more than 100 incendiary bombs landed on the roof), and protected it from looters, rats and their own desperate temptations.

At least 19 staff members died of starvation, including Aleksandr Shchukin, who perished at his desk while clutching a packet of almonds that could have saved his life. But theirs is also a tale of triumph. By 1967, 100 million acres of Russian agricultural land had been planted with seeds derived from the collection. And today, 90 per cent of the seeds and planted crops held in St Petersburg are found in no other scientific collection in the world.

Simon Parkin, author and journalist

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DID YOU KNOW...?

Ruled by the clock

William Strachey, an uncle of the Bloomsbury Group writer Lytton Strachey, spent several years in India where he became convinced that only clocks in Calcutta kept accurate time. Returning home, he spent 56 years continuing to live by Calcutta time. Since this was more than five hours ahead of London time, Strachey breakfasted at tea-time and lunched each evening. He also rose from his bed in the middle of the night when most of his fellow citizens were still sleeping.

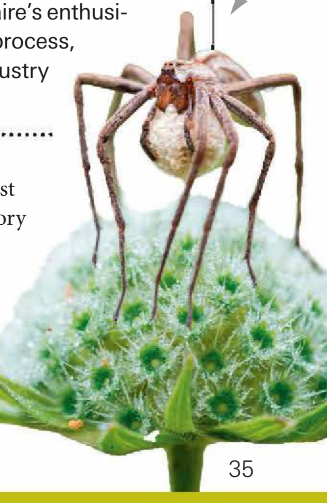
Cheese riots

In Nottingham in 1766, people rioted over the sale of cheese and one man was killed. Tensions arose when merchants from outside the county bought large numbers of cheeses which locals thought should stay in Nottinghamshire. As they tried to prevent the 'export' of these cheeses, violence broke out. Shop windows were broken, looting occurred and hundreds of cheese wheels were rolled down the city streets. Wagons carrying cheeses had briefly to be provided with an armed escort.

Silky spiders

A French scientist once created a fabric from spider silk. In 1709, Francois Bon de Saint Hilaire gathered together hundreds of spider egg sacs and, in his own words, "made this new silk which is in no ways inferior in beauty to old silk". He produced several pairs of gloves and stockings, some of which he presented to the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris. Despite Saint Hilaire's enthusiasm for the new process, the spider silk industry never took off.

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



A new silk made from spider egg sacs was invented in the 18th century

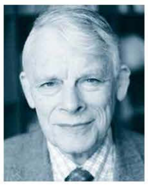
… Mind your Ps and Qs?

As early as 1607, to be on one's Ps and Qs meant 'to be in top form'. But today we know the phrase only as it appears in the title above (first recorded in 1756), though it may be contemporaneous with the earlier one. Idioms are like words: someone coins them, others pick them up, then the inventor's name is forgotten, and the riddle of origins remains unsolved.

The most common assumption is that this idiom comes from the simple fact that P and Q are the first letters of some words in English and French, and that they conjured up situations in which the phrase may have been used. Especially often the phrase "mind your toupées [postiche in French] and queues" was quoted, the queue being the pigtail of olden time.

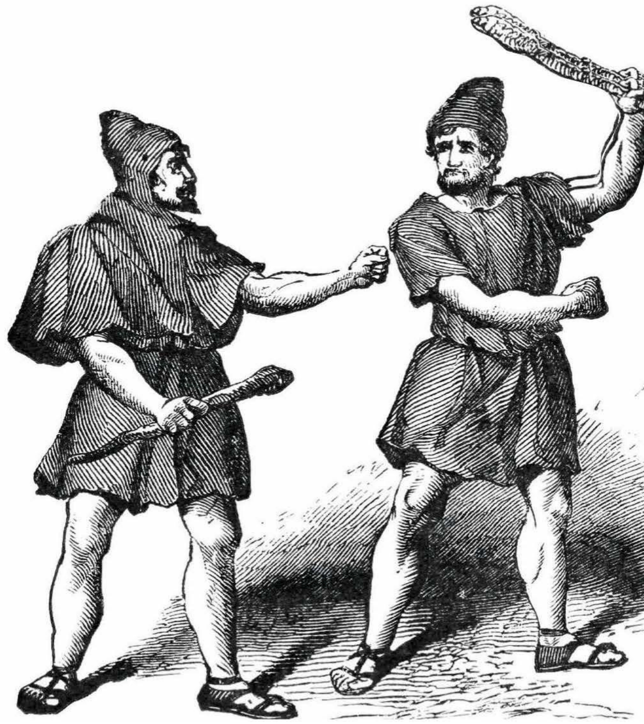
Yet for fun's sake, I'll quote another hypothesis, not mentioned in the easily available sources. Allegedly, punch used to be sold in bowls of two sizes: the P size was a shilling and the Q size cost sixpence. Might this provide a possible explanation?

Or could the idiom originate among printers, because young compositors experienced difficulty in distinguishing between the two letters which follow each other in the Roman alphabet and also look alike? Or among teachers, instructing their pupils not to confuse p and q? Those are more realistic approaches to the sought-for etymology, but alas, proof is wanting, and the result will remain the same: "Origin uncertain." Sorry!



Anatoly Liberman, professor and author of *An Analytic Dictionary of English Etymology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008)

ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN McBETH**



A 19th-century engraving depicts two plebeians, a class of commoners below the patricians in ancient Rome. They were free citizens but had limited rights in society

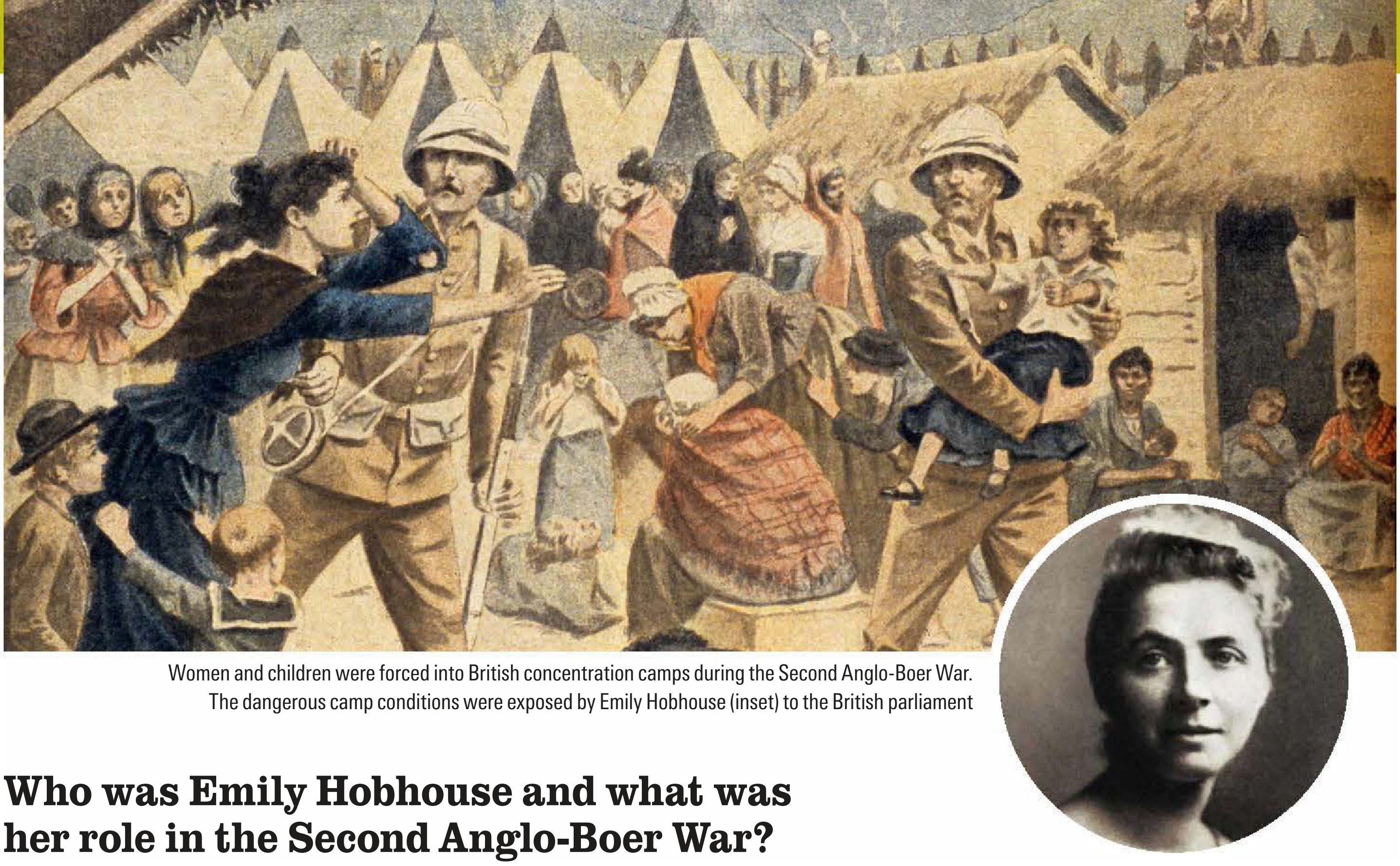
TOPFOTO

What was the secession of the plebeians?

In ancient Rome, the plebeians, which was the commoner class below the patricians, had limited rights and, unable to hold public office, they also had limited avenues of protest. What they did have was *secessio*. This was the act of literally removing themselves from Rome to one of the hills outside the city; like a strike, this would shut down many facets of everyday life with the aim of forcing the patricians to negotiate.

The first documented *secessio* took place in 494 BC when the plebeians, frustrated at the huge debts they faced and ongoing warfare, left Rome en masse and set up camp on the Mons Sacer (Sacred Mount). The patricians ultimately had no choice but to make concessions, including creating new public offices and a council to be populated by plebs only.

Although laws changed slowly – by 367 BC, one of the consuls of Rome legally had to be a plebeian – there were a few more secessions to keep things moving. The last one came in 287 BC, traditionally marking the end of the centuries-long class struggle in Rome that is known as the Conflict of the Orders. ***JW***



Women and children were forced into British concentration camps during the Second Anglo-Boer War. The dangerous camp conditions were exposed by Emily Hobhouse (inset) to the British parliament

Who was Emily Hobhouse and what was her role in the Second Anglo-Boer War?

Soon after the war broke out in 1899, Emily Hobhouse (1860-1926), an English woman, became involved in the South African Conciliation Committee, which was against the conflict. This prompted her to establish the South African Women and Children's Distress Fund in 1900. She travelled to the country to help alleviate the suffering caused by the scorched-earth policy, which saw Lord Kitchener eventually order the complete destruction of homesteads, grain stores and crops, and the killing of livestock.

When Hobhouse arrived in Cape Town at the end of 1900, she learned for the first time that tens of thousands of women and children had been forced into British concentration camps. They were not free to leave.

With the money from her fund and the support of women in Cape Town, she travelled on her own by train between several camps, where she found appalling conditions. People were packed into bell tents in the middle of the veld, there was a severe lack of clean drinking water, rations were poor, and diseases were rife.

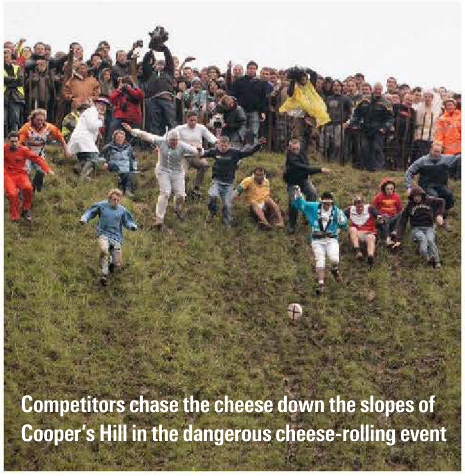
For nearly four months, Hobhouse distributed food, clothing and other necessities. Most importantly, she served as an eyewitness to the treatment of civilian women. She gathered evidence by observation and interviews with women and camp commanders.

Hobhouse returned to London in May 1901 to address the issue at home. There, she had two meetings with the minister of war, St John Brodrick, during which she handed him written recommendations for improving camp conditions. Soon, her 40-page report was published.

This caused an outcry in parliament and the press. The authorities discredited her integrity as an eyewitness to mitigate the report's impact. She was described as a liar, hysterical and a traitor. Her work as a whistleblower and pacifist humanitarian during wartime was not appreciated.

Months later, thanks to her activism, a Ladies' Commission was sent to investigate the camps. Hobhouse was neither included nor named but the commission's findings confirmed hers. Soon, conditions improved. Hobhouse was never formally recognised for her work in England, until now. The Story of Emily is a new museum in her home county of Cornwall honouring her work and legacy.

Elsabé Brits, journalist and biographer of Emily Hobhouse



Competitors chase the cheese down the slopes of Cooper's Hill in the dangerous cheese-rolling event

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What is the origin of cheese rolling?

The Cooper's Hill Cheese-Rolling and Wake, to give its official name, is a traditional event in which an enormous wheel of cheese (or a foam replica) is pursued down a very steep slope by contestants. It takes place every year at Cooper's Hill in Gloucestershire on the spring bank holiday (originally on Whit Monday), and there are a number of races throughout the day, including separate ones for men and women. The cheese is given a one-second head start, and the first person to cross the finish line wins the cheese.

It's a dangerous pastime: 15 people were injured in 1993 and fractures are common. Obviously, the practice runs contrary to much contemporary thinking on the values of health and safety and various attempts have been made to put a stop to it, but, thus far, it persists.

There are many claims as to the antiquity of the rite, ranging from a practice carried out by Phoenician traders to Celtic sun worship. However, the first textual evidence of cheese rolling comes in a communication to the local town crier in 1826.

Liz Williams, author of *Rough Music* (Reaktion Books, 2025)

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Food & exercise...

DESC/SERVING	KCAL	FATg
BREAKFAST	238	3.4
Porridge, Made with Skimmed... Medium bowl (160g)	117	1.9
Banana, Weighed without Skin Medium (100g)	81	0.1
Tea, Semi-Skimmed Milk [2x] Mug	40	1.4
LUNCH	771	30.4
Salmon, Wild, Baked without S... 100g (edible portion)	215	12.1
Cous Cous, Plain, Cooked Medium serving (120g)	214	1.2
Courgette, Grilled	19	0.2

TOTALS	KCAL	FATg
GOAL	1702	74.0
- FOOD	1705	45.4
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Spiked drinks, counterfeit coins and the lodgers from hell

Drugging, fraud, even murder – women couldn't *really* commit such heinous crimes, could they? **Rosalind Crone** explores five audacious female-led felonies from the 18th and 19th centuries

Accompanies the series **Lady Swindlers with Lucy Worsley**
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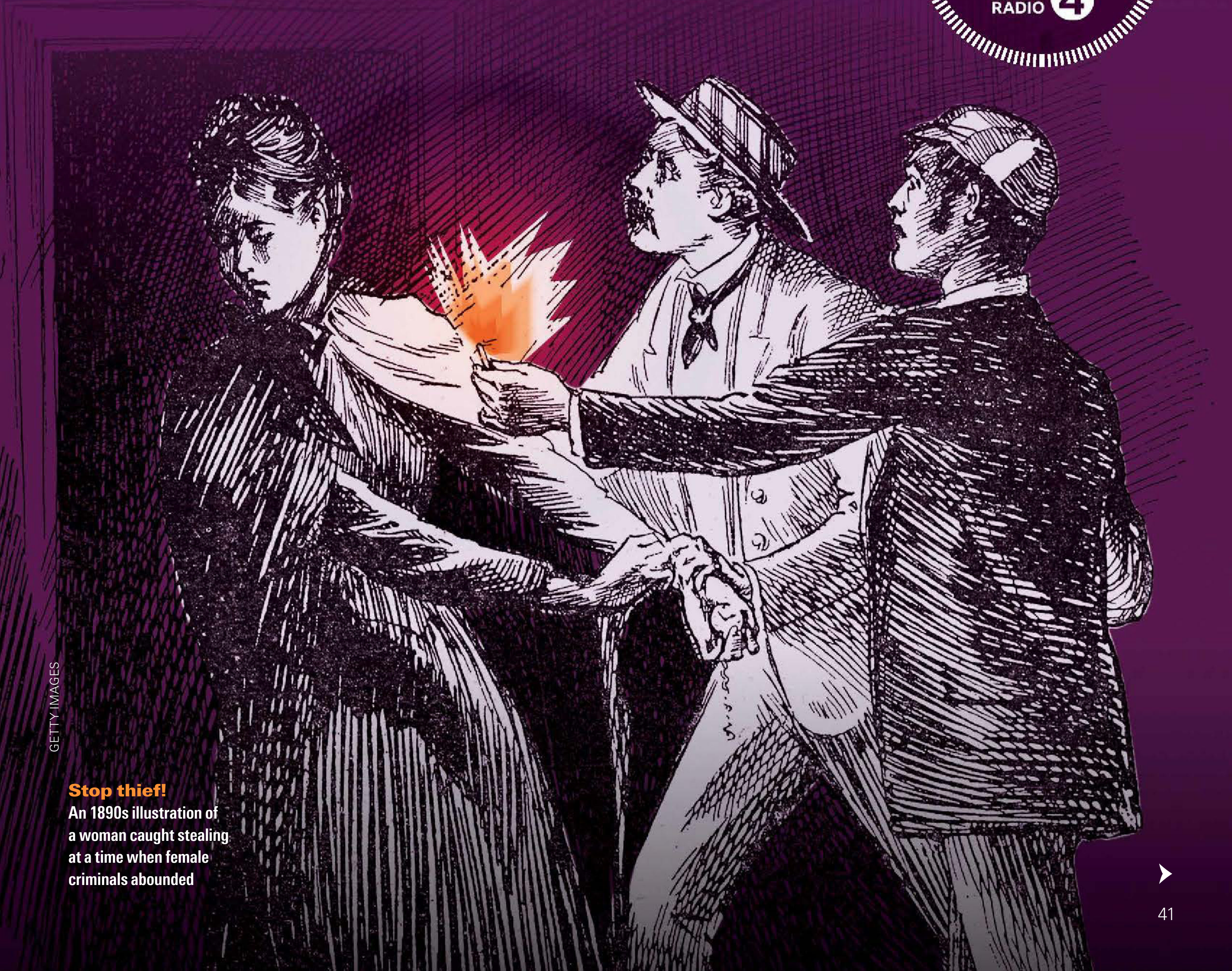

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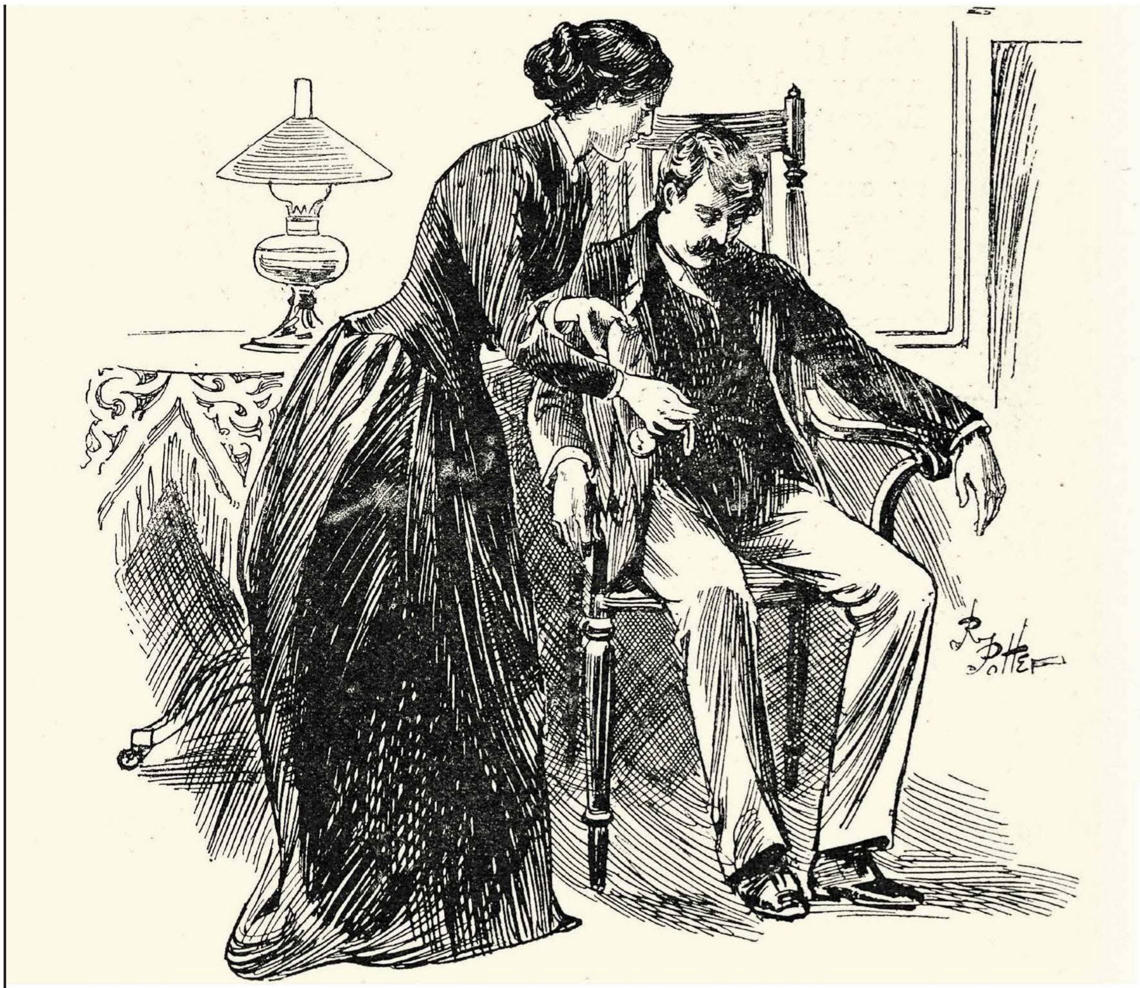
Stop thief! An 1890s illustration of a woman caught stealing at a time when female criminals abounded



Burroughs Wellcome & Co.
TABLOID
Opium Tincture
(Laudanum)
Each represents
min. 5
Snow Hill Buildings, London

LEFT: A 19th-century illustration of the moment a woman pilfered a pocket watch from a sleeping man
ABOVE: Sedative drugs such as laudanum were readily available to the public in the 19th century

1 The Victorian spiking crisis

Female thieves took to drugging men's drinks with opiates before cleaning out their victims' pockets

On 2 January 1865, Elizabeth Bagwell (alias Elizabeth Manning) was convicted at the Middlesex Sessions of "larceny from the person", and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude. It was a harsh punishment, reflecting the fact that she already had three previous convictions – but also that she was no ordinary pickpocket.

Bagwell had spiked the drink of James Rintoul, a London cab driver, at her lodgings off Edgware Road, according to press reports of her committal hearing at the Marylebone Police Court. The drugged glass of gin she gave James was, he claimed, "so hot that it burnt my mouth". He fell unconscious, and later woke to find himself "alone in the room, and in darkness. My gold watch and chain were gone… my ring also [and] 25 shillings from my pocket."

He had fallen victim to a crime commonly called 'hocussing', derived from 'hocus pocus' – the term used since the 17th century for conjuring, trickery or sleight of hand. By the late 19th century, 'hocus' had become shorthand for drugged liquor. Hocussing had become more prevalent by that time, likely because of the ready availability of cheap drugs including opium (in the form of laudanum), morphine and chloroform.

Particularly in convivial social settings such as Victorian public houses, it was easy for thieves to slip drugs into drinks undetected.

With the victims bewildered or unconscious, hocussers had time to search pockets thoroughly

With their victims bewildered or unconscious, hocussers had time to search pockets thoroughly, remove any valuable jewellery and escape the scene of the crime, making pursuit and prosecution difficult.

Poisoners in prison

Hocussing was deployed by women and men against victims of both sexes. As a weapon of the weak, poison enabled female thieves to overcome stronger male victims. Men who had been lured by the promise of sex with women hocussers may have been reluctant to prosecute, for fear of reputational damage.

Certainly, by 1865 Bagwell had already hocussed at least two other men – a medical student and a midshipman – both of whom declined to press charges. Following her release from prison on parole in 1869, she was convicted of theft from the person two more times. Her story suggests that there were probably many more victims of this technique – and many more female hocussers at work.

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Sex scandals and sugared death
Rosalind Crone discusses Victorian outrages on our podcast series **History's Greatest Scandals** at *historyextra.com/victorian-scandals*

2 The counterfeit coin con

Instead of stealing money from the pockets of others, some women had a go at literally making it themselves – and gambled with their lives

On 3 September 1788, Elizabeth Alford went to a neighbour's room in the lodging house she inhabited in Aldgate, London, to buy some thread. The neighbour, Christian Bowman (alias Catherine Murphy), was a single mother of three who worked as a servant in a public house and lived with a man named Hugh Murphy. On entering the room, Alford noticed "some bad money on the table", and that Bowman and Murphy looked a bit shifty. "They wanted to shut me in," Alford later told the court. Yet when she informed the couple that she had left her own door open, they let her go – and she went straight to her landlord, asking him to fetch an officer of the parish.

Fatal consequences

Later that day, officers caught Bowman and Murphy in the act of colouring pieces of base metal in the hope of passing them off as silver shillings. Bowman begged the officer for mercy, explaining that she had got involved in making counterfeit coins only after her husband had left her, and "never [passed] any bad money in the neighbourhood". Her pleas fell on deaf ears. The pair were both convicted of coining at the Old Bailey court, and sentenced to death. Murphy was hanged, while Bowman was strangled and her body burned at the stake outside Newgate Gaol.

Christian Bowman was one of 13 women burned for coining offences in England during the 18th century. It was a terrible punishment and used sparingly, but lawmakers believed it reflected the gravity of the crime, as coining was considered a form of treason. Between 1700 and 1789, 166 women were tried at the Old Bailey for coining offences. These included making, colouring or rubbing counterfeit coins; clipping or filing precious metal from legitimate coins; possessing tools to make counterfeit coins; and 'uttering' (trying to use) counterfeit coins. Only 65 of these women were found guilty, and about half of those were sentenced to death.

Christian Bowman was one of 13 women burned at the stake for coining in England during the 18th century

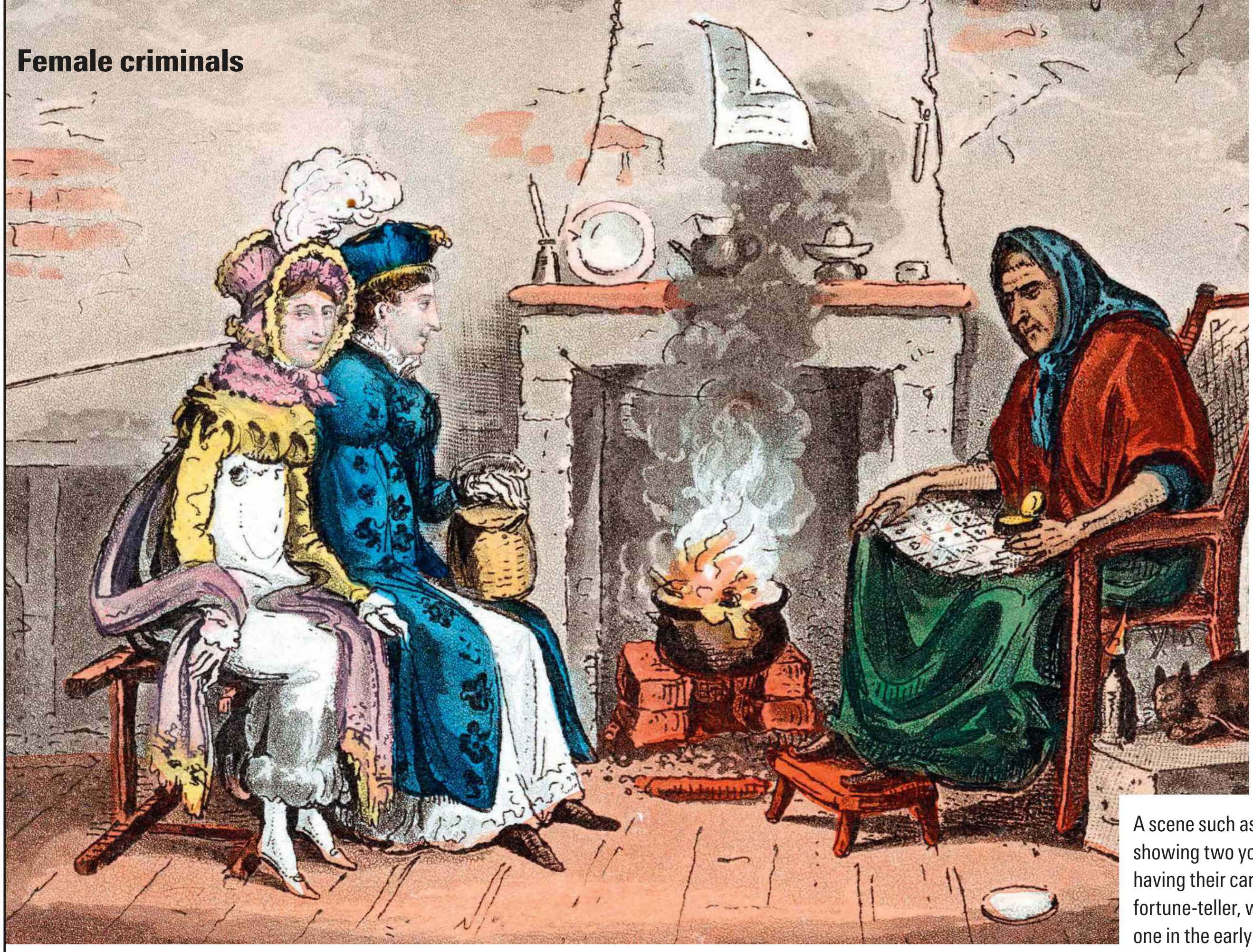
Women represented around one third of those tried for coining offences in England in the 18th century, a surprisingly high proportion. Though some women, such as Bowman, made counterfeit coins with male accomplices, others worked in single-sex groups. Coining was an activity that could be done at home, and with the help of family members.

Making fake coins required skill. Advances in the manufacture of legitimate coins, such as milled edges and gilding, made it harder for counterfeiters to produce convincing copies. Some women used the skills gained from other types of delicate finishing work to make coins; most almost certainly resorted to coining to supplement meagre wages.

The levels of evidence required for prosecution were demanding. In addition, most ordinary people did not regard coining as a heinous offence. So there were likely many female coiners who never came to court – and simply got away with their crimes.

ELEMENT PICTURES – BBC

LEFT: The BBC series *The Gallows Pole* tells the story of a gang of 18th-century coin clippers in Yorkshire
ABOVE: Clippings taken from English silver coins



A scene such as this, showing two young women having their cards read by a fortune-teller, was a familiar one in the early 19th century

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3 **Maladies, magic and murder**

Fraudulent 'wise women' and 'cunning folk' scammed desperate people hoping for cures – and some resorted to poisoning their victims

In March 1809, Mary Bateman was hanged at York for the murder of her client, Rebecca Perigo. Over the previous decade, Bateman, the wife of a wheelwright and the mother of four children, had been supplementing the family income by selling fortunes, charms and alternative medicines, and claimed to act as an intermediary for other 'wise women', including a Miss Blythe in Scarborough. Bateman's name was often recommended to those in need of help, including Perigo, who was suffering from a "fluttering in her breast", believed to be an "evil wish" that required the "arts of sorcery" to resolve. In May 1806 Bateman suggested that, with the help of Miss Blythe, Perigo could be cured – in time, and at some expense.

Over the following 12 months, Miss Blythe sent letters via Bateman to Rebecca and her husband, William, requesting money and various items – shoes, hat boxes, a tea caddy, eggs and bacon – in exchange for charms and spells to relieve Rebecca's symptoms. Then in April 1807, Miss Blythe warned Rebecca and William that they would soon succumb to a terrible illness. To escape death, she told them, they must "eat pudding for six days and… put into it one of my powders everyday". The powders contained poison, and Rebecca died. William continued to correspond with the 'wise woman' in Scarborough until October 1808, when he discovered that the charms were fake, that 'Miss Blythe' did not exist – and that Bateman had killed his wife.

Repeat offender

The unfortunate couple were the latest in a long list of ordinary and often desperate people duped by Bateman. Some lost only money and possessions; others also lost their lives. Bateman had earlier been publicly exposed as a fraud when she was caught pushing eggs, which contained the message "Christ is coming", back up the oviduct of her supposedly prophetic hen. Yet her perfidious activities continued.

To escape death, she told them, they must "eat pudding for six days and put into it one of my powders"

The 1735 Witchcraft Act had made it a crime to pretend to exercise or use any kind of witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment or conjuration, to tell fortunes, or to use "crafty science" to locate lost or stolen goods. Offenders were to be sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment. This legislation did not stop Bateman nor, in all likelihood, others like her.

We must not assume that all 'cunning folk' at the turn of the 19th century were knowingly fraudulent; some sincerely believed in their magic powers. The case of Bateman, though, exposes an unscrupulous side to this business – frauds who took advantage of ordinary people living in uncertain times, who sought explanations and remedies for misfortune and illness, and who continued to believe in the supernatural and the utility of magic. This type of criminal activity might have been far more prevalent than previously imagined.

4 **Light-fingered lodgers**

People who rented rooms in furnished lodgings pilfered items to pawn or sell – and many probably got away with their crimes

Criminal justice historians suspect that women perpetrated far more theft from private spaces than was ever prosecuted. Many domestic servants casually or even systematically appropriated or stole things from their employers. Larceny by a servant was even a specific category of offence. When the items were of relatively low (or sometimes even high) value, many masters and mistresses did not think taking such thieves to court was worthwhile. Instead, a pilfering servant was typically dismissed without a reference – a tough punishment.

The case of Amelie Decuypere and her husband, Paul, sheds light on a different type of theft from the domestic space: taking goods from furnished lodgings. In July 1859, the Decuyperes were arrested in London, following a complaint made by their former landlord, David Berri. Just six days after moving into a furnished room in Berri's house, the couple disappeared – along with a coffee pot, a clock and several paintings. To divert attention from their absence, or to indicate their intention to return, the couple left in the room a large chest that, on inspection, "turned out to be filled with straw".

The police found in the couple's possession a pile of receipts issued by pawnbrokers for items exchanged for cash – property that "no doubt had been stolen from other lodgings". Three landlords pressed charges, but the magistrate believed that there could have been "at least a dozen" victims in total.

Amelie and Paul Decuypere got caught largely because of the impressive scale of their theft, and were sentenced to six and eight years' penal servitude, respectively. Although Amelie remained silent during her trial, the judge and jury decided that she and her husband were equal partners in the crime. As historians have shown, women made good thieves in private spaces because they often best understood the value of domestic items.

5 **Criminal credit crunch**

As retail opportunities opened up to wider society, female fraudsters abused ease of credit to take goods with no intention of paying for them

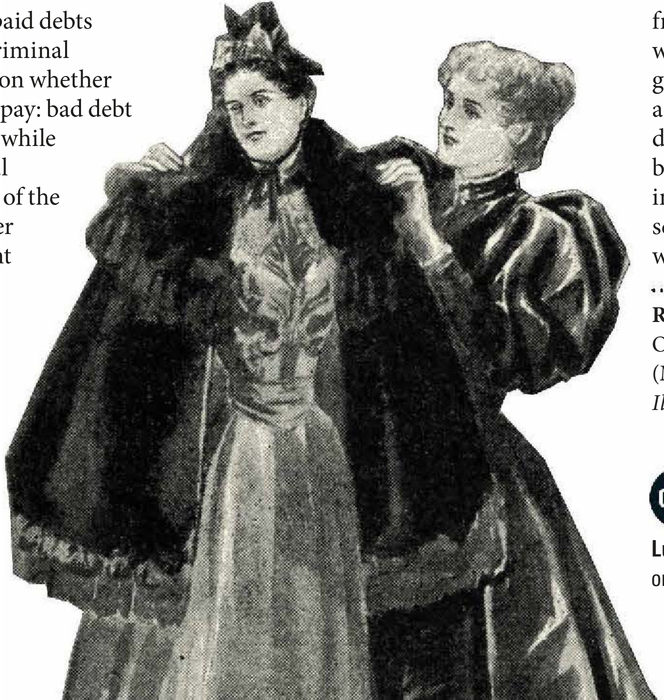
For centuries, wealthy people in England purchased goods and services on credit, promising to pay at a later date. In the 19th century, as real wages were rising and the 'retail revolution' was under way, personal credit was extended to more people across society, including the upper working classes and women. This system relied on reputation and trust – and was increasingly open to abuse in densely populated urban environments. To gain credit, a woman needed simply to look respectable and to provide a plausible address.

It was often difficult for those demanding payment to prove that unpaid debts were not bad debts but were criminal frauds. The difference hinged on whether there was ever an intention to pay: bad debt was dealt with by civil courts, while fraud ended up in the criminal courts. The popular depiction of the faux-aristocratic male swindler likely enabled many fraudulent women to escape detection simply because they didn't fit that stereotype.

One woman who *did* get caught was serial swindler Annie Gordon Baillie – not her real name, but one of some 40 aliases she used across her lifetime. The illegitimate daughter of a farm servant from Peterhead, Scotland, Annie harboured ambitions of wealth and fame. Her career included collecting money for fake charities and the ruthless exploitation of an aged baronet, but began and ended with the fraudulent acquisition of goods and services on credit.

Annie ran up debts in cities across Britain and much farther afield: in Dundee, London and Broadstairs, but also in Rome, New York and Melbourne, Australia. In 1884, the London Association for the Protection of Trade warned about a woman using several aliases who had run up bills with piano manufacturers, chemists and other businesses. By 1888, the police in London and Edinburgh were on the case, and published a full expose in the *Edinburgh Evening News*.

Despite this publicity, it wasn't until four months later, on 23 June 1888, that the culprit was finally arrested. At Annie's committal hearing, Detective Inspector Marshall said that the police had uncovered "hundreds, and probably to the extent of thousands" of frauds. "The prisoner is an extraordinary woman," Marshall declared, "one of the greatest swindlers in the country." Greed, and a love of attention, had led to Annie's downfall. Had she been less flamboyant, by living more modestly and eschewing interviews about her outlandish charitable schemes, she might well have got away with it.



Personal credit was extended to women in the 19th century for goods including clothes

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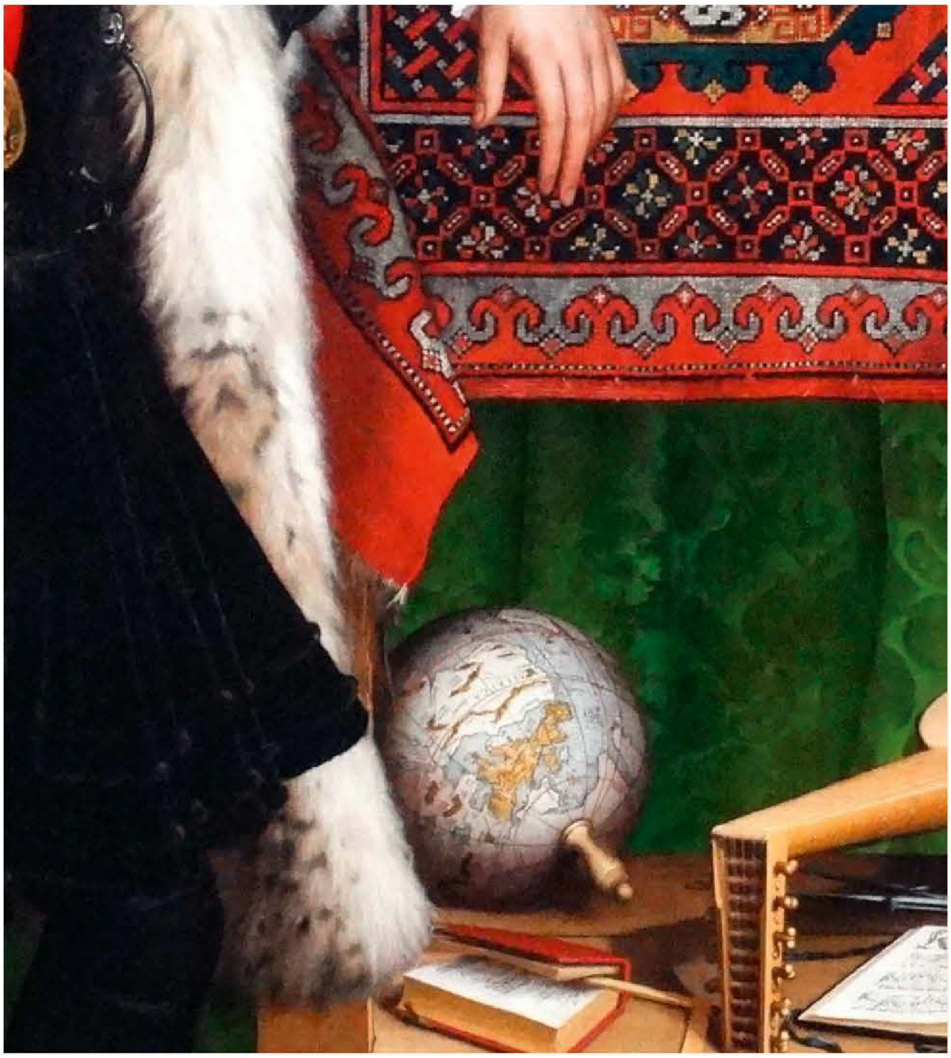
Rosalind Crone is professor of history at the Open University, and author of *Violent Victorians* (Manchester University Press, 2012) and *Illiterate Inmates* (Oxford University Press, 2022)

Rosalind Crone is the historical consultant on **Lady Swindlers with Lucy Worsley**, which is airing now on BBC Radio 4 and BBC Sounds



Topsy-turvy world The upturned terrestrial globe featured in Hans Holbein's famous double portrait is one of many elements hinting at the political, religious and social upheavals sweeping much of Europe

Painting on the precipice

Hans Holbein's masterwork *The Ambassadors* is an exquisite portrait of two 16th-century diplomats. But it is also crammed with symbols and hidden messages. **Tracy Borman** deciphers the clues that betray the turbulence of a fateful year

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All about the Tudors
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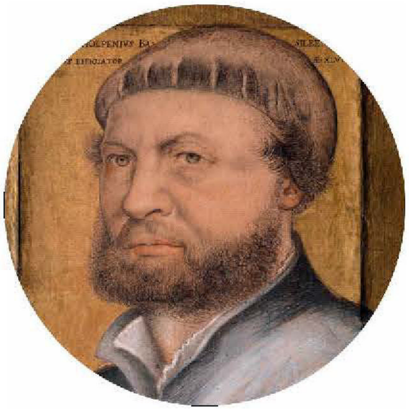
Europe was teetering on the brink of a major rift. Relations between England and continental powers, always fragile, were at risk of fracturing fatally. Often violent confrontations between the Catholic Church and burgeoning Protestant adherents were spreading like wildfire, and the English king seemed determined to add fuel to those flames. Tensions could scarcely be higher.

It was at that moment, in 1533, that Hans Holbein the Younger – the most celebrated court painter of the Tudor age – accepted a commission from a recently arrived visitor to the English court. A portrait would be produced, celebrating the wealth of those depicted. But in its extraordinary details, some more obscure and cryptic than others, the picture also reveals important aspects of the sitters and the tempestuous era in which it was painted. As London's National Gallery celebrates the reopening of its Sainsbury Wing and a major redisplay of its collection, it seems like an apposite moment to take a fresh look at this masterful painting and the turbulent year that spawned it.



Portrait of the artist Hans Holbein the Younger c1542–43, likely sketched by his own hand. Having earlier visited England, the artist was inundated with commissions on his return in c1532

The alliance between the kings of England and France was under threat – which destabilised the entire power balance in Europe

In the eye of the storm

Henry VIII, king since 1509, had recently defied the pope by setting aside his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, to marry Anne Boleyn, the woman who had captivated him for the previous seven years. This sparked a seismic shift in England's religious, political and social life that would reverberate down the centuries.

Jean de Dinteville, ambassador of Henry VIII's great rival, Francis I of France, instructed Holbein to capture this extraordinary moment with a portrait of himself and his fellow diplomat Georges de Selve, both of whom were caught in the eye of the gathering storm. The result would become one of the artist's most celebrated works.

Dinteville, then aged 28, was a member of one of the most influential families in France. His first embassy to England had been in 1531, the year when Henry was granted the title of supreme head of the English church. With the king of England now on the verge of severing all ties with Rome for good, the stakes were even higher on Dinteville's second visit in 1533. It was vital for his royal master to receive accurate information about events in England as they unfolded.

It was not a task that he accepted with any relish. He would have preferred to stay at home in his château of Polisy in the picturesque region of Champagne, close to the city of Troyes, south-east of Paris.

Upon arriving in London, Dinteville was lodged in Bridewell Palace on the banks of the Fleet river, the usual residence for French ambassadors. The splendour of his surroundings provided cold comfort. His correspondence is full of complaints about the English weather, and he was ill for most of his stay with an affliction similar to malaria. In a letter, he assured his brother that his illness was not serious, but wryly remarked: "You know how I love this country. I truly believe that as long as I am here, I shall never be entirely healthy."

The misery of Dinteville's stay was alleviated in April 1533 by the arrival of Georges de Selve. As well as being bishop of Lavaur, de Selve served as ambassador to Emperor Charles V, the Venetian Republic and the Holy See. Being a cleric, de Selve was deeply affected by the religious divisions in Europe, and had witnessed the repression of Lutheranism (which became known as Protestantism) in German districts in recent years. It is not known how the two ambassadors – who were of similar ages – knew each other, but the affection with which Dinteville wrote of de Selve, and the fact that he commissioned a portrait of them together, suggests friendship, even intimacy.

By the time of de Selve's arrival in England, religious tensions had worsened and the political situation was on a knife edge. In May 1533, Henry VIII's marriage to Catherine of Aragon was finally annulled and Anne Boleyn was confirmed as his legitimate queen by Thomas Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury. For all the elaborate cordiality between the kings of England and France, their alliance was now under threat – which destabilised the entire power balance in Europe.

It is not clear exactly when Dinteville commissioned Holbein to paint the double portrait, but de Selve had left England by early June so it must have been before then.

Swirling upheaval

Holbein came from a family of artists in Augsburg, southern Germany. He had first visited England in 1526 under the patronage of Thomas More, one of the most influential members of Henry VIII's court. As well as undertaking portraits of More and his family, Holbein worked as a decorative painter at the royal court. His fame spread and, by the time he returned to England in 1532 (or possibly 1531), he was inundated with commissions. These included designs for table fountains and fireplaces, goldsmith's work and other embellishments for the king's palaces, as well as the portraits and miniatures of prominent courtiers for which he is best known today.

Dinteville's commission, though, would be unlike any that Holbein had undertaken in England before then. The ambassador clearly intended the painting to be very different from the conventional portraits of prominent figures that had become the artist's stock-in-trade at the Tudor court. Laden with clues, iconography and messages, it reflects a very particular and pivotal moment in time. England and Europe stood on the edge of a precipice, with religious turmoil, political and social upheaval swirling below. Dinteville knew that events were rapidly spiralling out of control; here, suspended in the painting, they would be captured for posterity in symbols, their complexities hidden in plain sight for future generations to discover.

It is highly unlikely that Dinteville and de Selve ever posed for the portrait in the sumptuous and complex interior featured in the finished composition. Already accustomed

BRIDGEMAN

The Ambassadors deciphered

Transitional time

The shepherd's dial, a type of cylindrical sundial, appears to indicate a date of either 11 April or 15 August. On the former day in 1533, the court was told that Anne Boleyn would be accorded royal honours. However, the readings shown on this and other instruments in the painting can't be relied upon, being dependent on sunlight but painted indoors. It's possible Holbein intended the divergent times and dates to convey the message that Europe was out of joint – a world in transition.

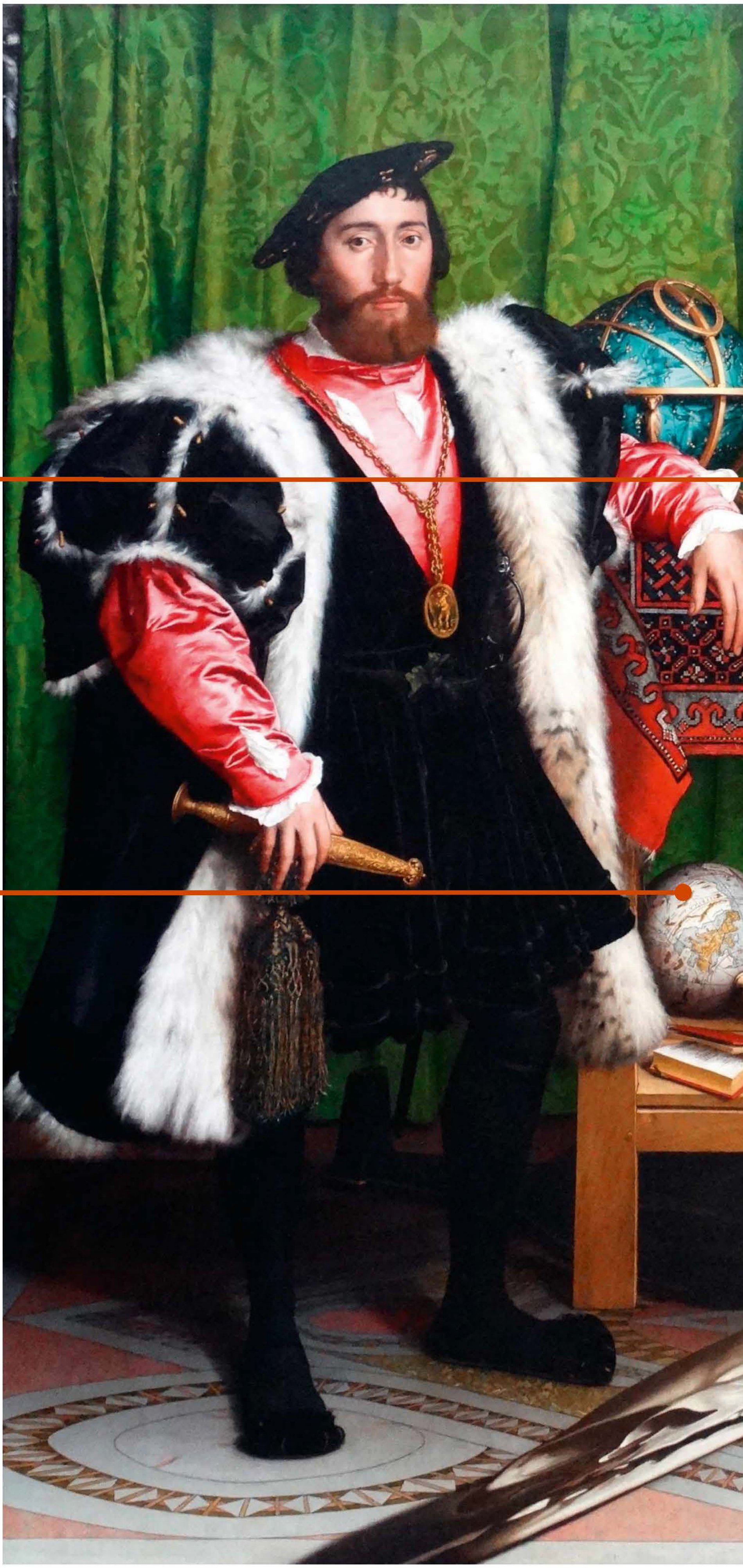
Europe upside down

The terrestrial globe focuses on France – with Dinteville's château, Polisy (spelt Policy, perhaps a pun on his diplomatic mission), in prime position. Centuries later, this would provide one of the most important clues to the identity of the sitter. Paris is shown as well (spelt with a 'B', which might be how Holbein pronounced it), along with Lyon, where the French court was also based. Europe is shown upside down – a reference, perhaps, to the religious turmoil sparked by the Reformation.

to working with busy courtiers who had little time to sit, Holbein preferred to construct his paintings piecemeal, making numerous preparatory drawings and sketching the sitters from life so that their presence was not required during the longer process of painting.

We don't know how long it took Holbein to paint *The Ambassadors*, but he was in great demand as an artist and completed a number of other works in 1533, so it's likely that he worked quickly. He took various shortcuts, such as the inclusion of a green curtain as a backdrop – a device that he had used in his paintings since the 1520s. The tiled floor that appears in the foreground was painted quite simply, and the tufts of the oriental carpet were created with a thick brush, possibly for speed as well as for effect.

The finished portrait, though, was breathtaking. Measuring just over 2 metres square, it is one of the largest paintings Holbein ever produced – and one of the most unusual and intriguing. The two ambassadors dominate the composition. In contrast with the head-and-shoulders portraits popular with Henry's courtiers, the men are shown full-length,



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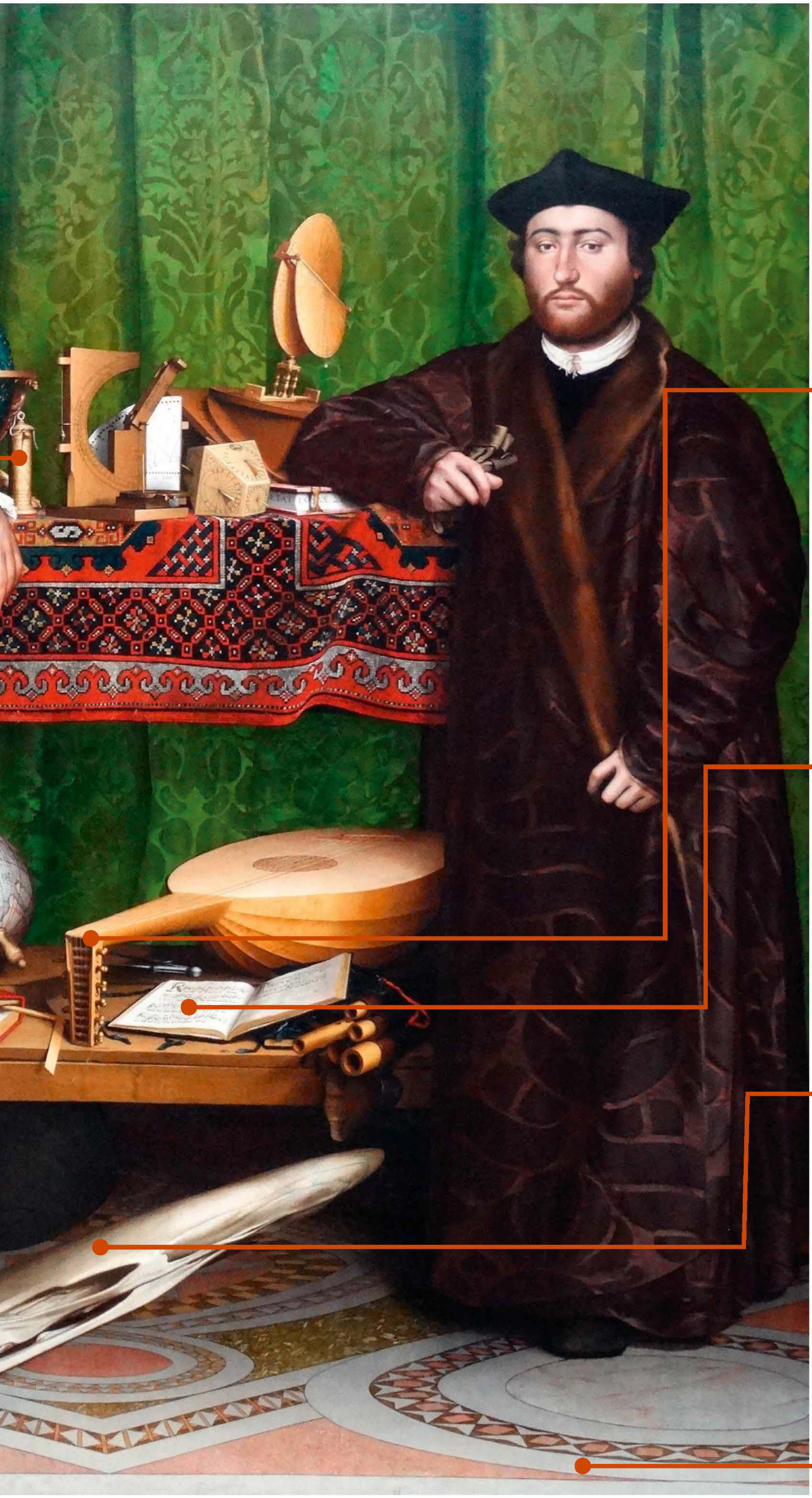


Discordant notes

Another clue that this is no ordinary composition, the broken lute string symbolises discord. One flute is missing from the nearby case, inferring a lack of harmony; the music of flutes was also commonly associated with war. Left of the lute sits a German arithmetic book, propped open with a set square at a page about division – it begins with the word *Dividirt* ('let division be made').

Religious reconciliation

It was dangerous to possess a Lutheran hymnbook like this in England or France at the time, so it was probably there to convey a message about religious division. The hymns shown are not in the right place according to the original book on which this is based, suggesting disorder. Both were traditional Catholic anthems, but were published in German at the Lutheran town of Wittenberg in 1524. This may indicate Georges de Selve's desire to bring together the warring sides of the church.

Mortal thoughts

Viewed from below and left, this large anamorphic element snaps into view as a human skull. Dinteville's personal motto was: 'Remember thou shalt die.' (His hat badge also features a skull.) Peeking out from the top left-hand corner of the painting, partially concealed by the green curtain, is a silver crucifix. This symbol of salvation and eternal life offered hope to Christians everywhere, Catholics and Protestants alike.

Bestriding history

The two ambassadors stand on an exquisite pavement inlaid with coloured stones set in an elaborate geometric design. It's reminiscent of the Cosmati Pavement before the high altar in Westminster Abbey, named after the 13th-century Italian family of marble workers who completed it for Henry III in 1268. Dinteville would certainly have seen this pavement – because it was in that precise location that Anne Boleyn was crowned on 1 June 1533.

standing on either side of a piece of furniture with two shelves. Their stances, each with an arm resting on the carpet that covers the shelves, seems to invite the viewer to study the objects displayed. These include scientific, astronomical and musical instruments: items on the upper shelf relate to the heavens, those on the lower to the Earth.

In creating the double portrait, Holbein showcased an array of painting techniques that he had refined during his career to date. The sumptuousness of Dinteville's clothes, with the sheen of his pink satin doublet and the play of light on the folds of the material, appears exquisitely lifelike. In contrast, de Selve is dressed in sombre colours, which was typical of many of Holbein's sitters in the 1530s – notably Henry VIII's chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, who had sat for the artist within the past year. However, the result is just as rich in depth and texture. Holbein also showed off his technique for decorative gilding to dazzling effect, picking out details such as Dinteville's chain, hat badge and dagger sheath.

There is no record of Dinteville's reaction to the finished painting, nor of who else might have seen it. Dinteville attended Anne Boleyn's coronation on 1 June, and was instructed by Francis I to remain in England until the birth of her child, to whom his master had agreed to be godfather. On 7 September 1533, though, the new queen gave birth not to the hoped-for boy but to a girl – the future Elizabeth I.

"The King's mistress was delivered of a daughter, to the great regret both of him and the lady," reported the gleeful imperial ambassador, Eustace Chapuys. The celebratory jousts and fireworks were quietly cancelled, and the French king was no longer expected to stand as godfather to a mere princess.

Dinteville left England two months later, returning to his home at Polisy. Though he almost certainly took *The Ambassadors* with him, the first recorded reference to it at the château is dated more than 50 years later – by which time Dinteville was long dead. The painting was later taken to England during the tumult of the French Revolution. It was acquired by the 2nd Earl of Radnor for the gallery of his Wiltshire home, Longford Castle, and then sold by the 5th Earl to London's National Gallery in 1890.

> **Events were rapidly spiralling out of control. Here, suspended in the painting, they would be captured for posterity in symbols**

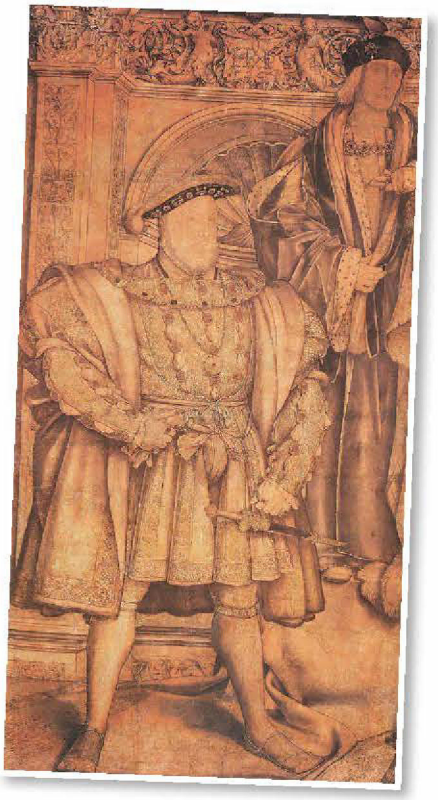
Mystery men

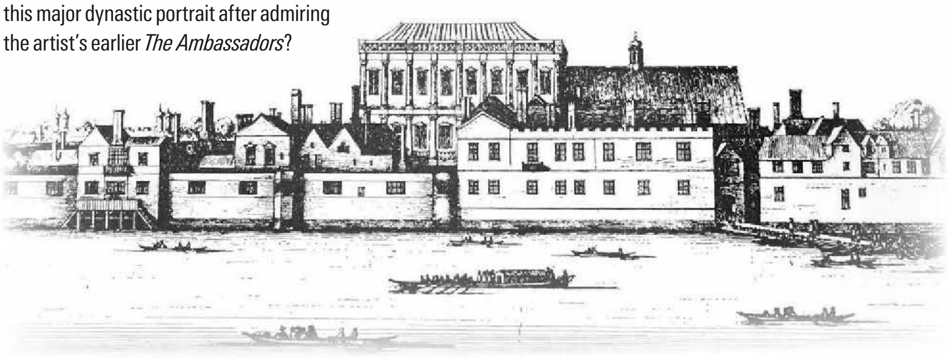
After some restoration work, *The Ambassadors* went on public display. The intense interest in the painting sparked debate about the identity of the sitters, which was not known at the time. It was widely assumed that they were English, given that Holbein produced numerous portraits of Henry VIII and his courtiers. Various names were put forward, including Anne Boleyn's former companion and admirer, the poet Thomas Wyatt. It was thanks to detective work by the historian Mary Hervey, whose account of the painting was published in 1900, that both men were correctly identified. After sifting through numerous documents in French archives, she found a fragment of a 1653 inventory that correctly named the sitters.

The Ambassadors is now one of the most famous paintings in the National Gallery, and millions of visitors admire it each year. Although it's not known who among Holbein's contemporaries saw the finished work, it is tempting to speculate that it inspired Henry VIII to commission one of the most famous paintings of the Tudor era.

In 1536–37, Holbein painted a huge mural for the palace of Whitehall. It featured the king with his parents, Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, and his third wife, Jane Seymour, to whom he was betrothed a day after the execution of Anne Boleyn for adultery and treason in May 1536.

The original was lost in the fire that destroyed Whitehall in 1698, but Holbein's sketch for it still survives in the National Portrait Gallery. Just like the sitters in *The Ambassadors*, Henry was painted full-length, and his broad frame and strident pose are reminiscent of Jean de Dinteville's. This portrait became the most famous depiction of the Tudor king – and an enduring image of royal power.





Artistic influence

RIGHT: Holbein's sketch for the huge mural of Henry VIII and his family that graced Whitehall Palace (below) until it was ravaged by fire in 1698. Was the king inspired to commission this major dynastic portrait after admiring the artist's earlier *The Ambassadors*?

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Tracy Borman's new book, *Holbein: The Ambassadors* (National Gallery Global), is available now

Hear Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss **Hans Holbein at the Tudor court** on an episode of *In Our Time* at *bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b06gw3jj*

BBC SOUNDS

things we've learned over the past 25 years

To celebrate a quarter-century of *BBC History Magazine*, we asked 25 expert contributors to nominate the most important historical discoveries and revelations since the publication launched in 2000

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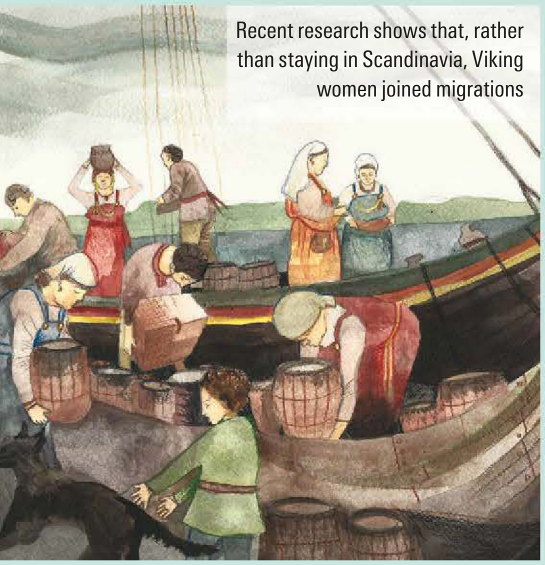


Recent research shows that, rather than staying in Scandinavia, Viking women joined migrations

1 Women played major roles in the Viking Age

BY **CAT JARMAN**

Just 25 years ago, there seemed to be little new to say about the Vikings – and that was particularly the case for Viking women. The centuries-old consensus was that Viking wives and daughters stayed at home, passively watching as the Viking Age unfolded around them.

New technologies have forced a rethink, though, completely revolutionising what we know about Viking women. The first significant discovery came from a systematic survey of a nationwide database of metal-detected female dress jewellery. This demonstrated for the first time that Scandinavian women migrated to England in substantial numbers. Next, isotope analysis of teeth from the graves of Viking women showed that they had formed a key part of the migration process elsewhere, too, moving across the Viking world alongside their families.

The most dramatic and most debated discovery, however, came through analysis of ancient DNA. In Birka, Sweden, an individual buried in a high-status warrior grave turned out to be biologically female. This led to a worldwide discussion of the roles of Viking women: we now agree that, though many certainly did stay at home, some played active roles in trade, craft and manufacturing processes, and even held military positions.

Cat Jarman is an archaeologist, author and TV presenter. Her books include *The Bone Chests: Unlocking the Secrets of the Anglo-Saxons* (William Collins, 2023)

Walter Tull, an English footballer of Caribbean heritage, c1908–11 and (below) with the FA Amateur Cup-winning Clapton FC team of 1908–09. Commissioned as a second lieutenant in the British Army, he was killed in action in France in March 1918

2 Britain has been culturally diverse for far longer than most believed

BY **OLIVETTE OTELE**

The murder of George Floyd by white police officer Derek Chauvin in 2020 signalled a turning point in the way the histories of people of African descent were taught and perceived across Europe. From that moment, the British press and institutions felt that they had to engage better with narratives about minority ethnic communities.

A renewed interest in personal histories and trajectories of people of African descent in Britain showcased stories about their links to major events – from the celebrated story of the British-Jamaican nurse Mary Seacole during the Crimean War to the experiences of black British football player Walter Tull and other soldiers of Caribbean and African descent who fought for Britain during the world wars.

We also saw a number of new black history courses launched in UK universities, and school classes featuring black, Asian and minority ethnic histories. Uncovering these multiple trajectories further highlights how culturally diverse Britain has been over many centuries, and why sharing stories about a common past can bring communities together.

Olivette Otele is a distinguished research professor at SOAS University of London. Her books include *African Europeans: An Untold History* (Hurst, 2020)

LAUREA GRACE-HAINES/GETTY IMAGES

3 The Tudors got Richard III wrong

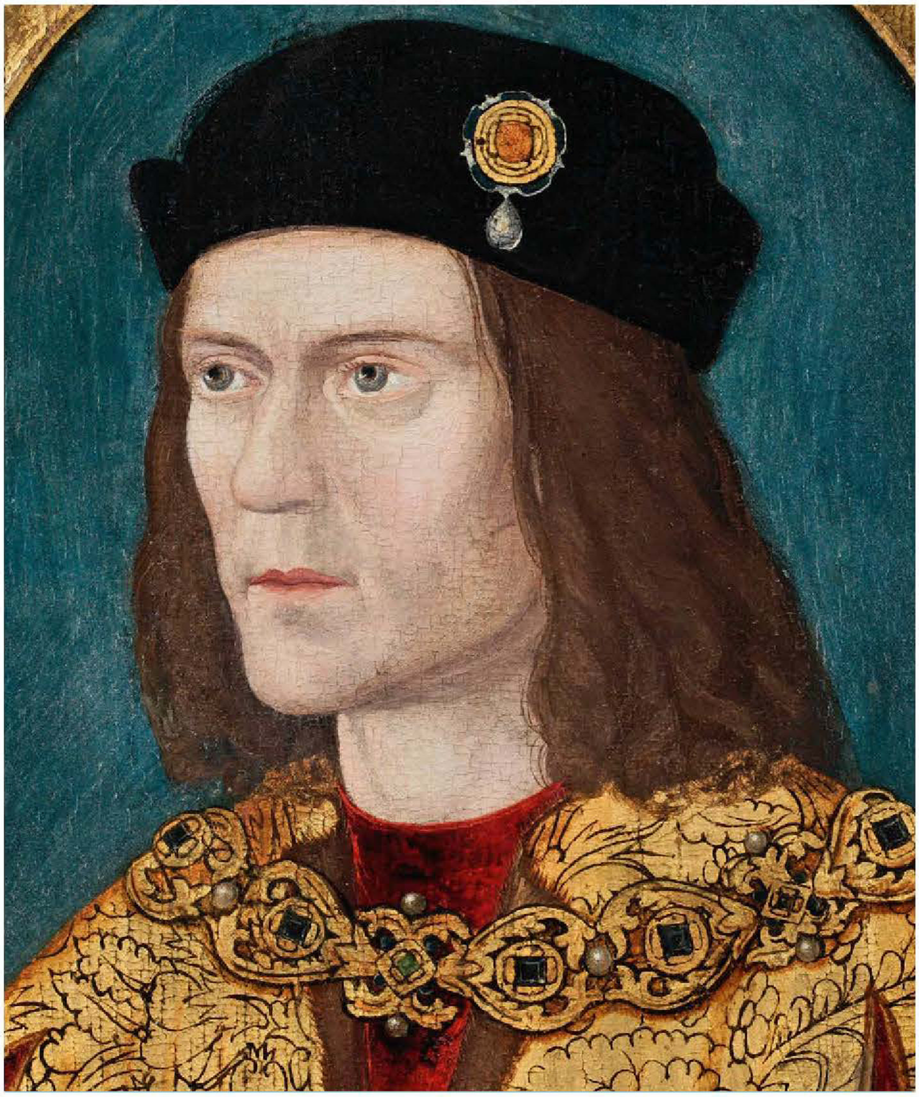
BY **PHILIPPA LANGLEY**

We learned many things from the discovery of Richard III's skeleton beneath a Leicester car park 13 years ago. We learned about the king's physique, his diet and the injuries he sustained while fighting for crown and country at Bosworth against a foreign-backed invader.

But, for me, two lessons in particular stand out from the discovery. The first is that history can make no progress unless it's ready to test and deconstruct generally held traditions and assumptions – even those held by historians and archaeologists. Those of us working on the Looking for Richard Project trusted only our own painstaking, personal research in primary sources.

Second, we learned that Shakespeare's hunchback and withered arm never existed. Analysis of Richard's skeleton – which had lain underfoot and peacefully undisturbed for 500 years – revealed that his limbs were sound, and that his spine showed a scoliosis that was invisible to onlookers. Richard's makeshift burial in the wake of his defeat at Bosworth, in a grave cut too short, was hugely revealing. It speaks across the centuries of a victor's disrespect for a fallen king.

Philippa Langley is a historian, author and producer. Her latest book is *The Princes in the Tower: Solving History's Greatest Cold Case* (The History Press, 2023)



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Richard III, portrayed after 1510 – long after his death at Bosworth. "History can make no progress unless it's ready to test and deconstruct generally held assumptions," says Philippa Langley

4 Magna Carta was only part of a truly revolutionary settlement

BY **NICHOLAS VINCENT**

King John's Magna Carta is perhaps the best-known document in world history, generally regarded as the first attempt to place kingship itself under the rule of law. Not surprisingly, it has been much studied. Yet a torrent of new evidence has been brought to light over the past 20 years, transforming understanding of both the document and its wider context.

We now know of many more 'original' Magna Cartas (from its subsequent reissues) than were previously dreamed of. And incidental discoveries in archives from Paris to New England have reshaped our appreciation of what actually happened in 1215.

A fortuitous discovery in Lambeth Palace Library, for example, reveals that the charter was part of a truly revolutionary settlement, with the barons briefly permitted dual control of local government in tandem with the king. We know, too, that John himself made no attempt to publish the charter. On the contrary, it was the bishops who ensured its distribution, preservation and even, in some cases, its physical copying.

The archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, is unmasked not so much as an honest broker between king and barons but as an ideologically committed adherent of the anti-royal party. By such means can new evidence help us rewrite the past – even for the oldest and best-known stories.

A 1225 version of the charter known as Magna Carta, which was issued by Henry III a decade after the better-known document sealed by John

Nicholas Vincent is professor of medieval history at the University of East Anglia. His books include *John* (Allen Lane, 2020)

Women and children displaced by the civil war in Sudan, February 2025. The roots of such conflicts lie deep in the past, says Jonathan Dimbleby

5 We ignore the past at our peril

BY **JONATHAN DIMBLEBY**

Most compellingly, the past 25 years have reminded us that history matters. Every life-sapping conflict since the millennium – Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Libya, Ukraine, Gaza – has its roots deep in the past.

Of course, the past does not determine the future, but the future is shaped by the past. Merely railing against adversaries or shouting 'victory' from the rooftops may make for good headlines but, in the absence of some understanding of 'how we got from there to here', such indulgence is vacuous grandstanding.

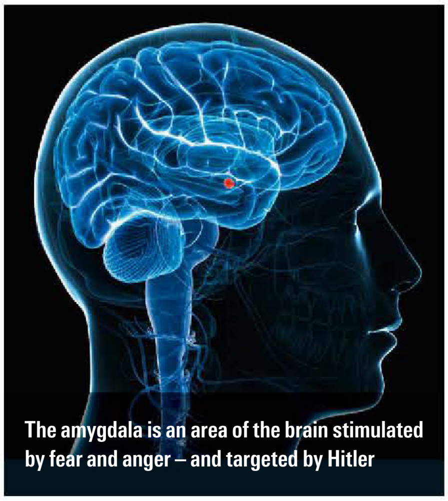
The past has never been 'another country'. This is especially true of Europe, where the tectonic plates did not stop shifting with the end of the Second World War in 1945 or the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The events of the past 25 years have demonstrated only too cruelly that our continent is inherently, and sometimes alarmingly, unstable.

All leaders claim to act in what they believe to be the national interest. The less they make ill-judged declaratory statements of intent and the more they demonstrate a realistic vision of the future, based on a clear awareness of the past, the better it will be for all of us. History is a great mentor.

Jonathan Dimbleby is a historian, biographer and broadcaster. His latest book is *Endgame 1944: How Stalin Won the War* (Viking, 2024)

6 Hitler tapped into hard-wired emotions to stir up hatred

BY **LAURENCE REES**



The amygdala is an area of the brain stimulated by fear and anger – and targeted by Hitler

For my new book, I found it tremendously helpful to talk to academic psychologists and neuroscientists about the insights we can gain, in general terms, from their disciplines. For instance, I learned how Hitler – without knowing the science behind his actions – tapped into a profound truth about the way the brain works.

In stirring up hatred against Jews and Bolsheviks, Hitler targeted the amygdala – the part of the brain that immediately processes feelings of anxiety, fear and anger. These powerful emotions are produced almost instantly, because it's the amygdala that helps us avoid sudden danger. It's a survival mechanism that, as the neuroscientist Professor Robert Sapolsky explained to me, is "hard-wired into us… and we'll never get rid of it".

Hitler capitalised on this neurobiological tendency, and in the process did his best to subdue the parts of the brain that offer a more logical analysis. Indeed, he seemed to confirm that he was well aware of the immense power of this approach when he remarked, during a private speech to the Hamburger Nationalklub in 1926, that "the only stable emotion is hate".

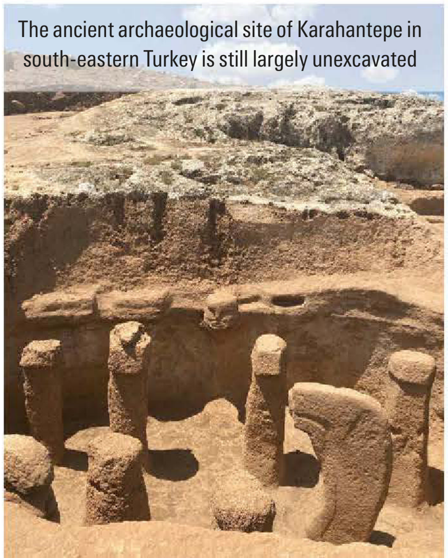
Laurence Rees is a historian, author and documentary film-maker. His new book is *The Nazi Mind: Twelve Warnings From History* (Viking, 2025)

7 Hunter-gatherers and farmers joined in wild rituals 12,000 years ago

BY **BETTANY HUGHES**

Around the turn of this millennium, in a remote south-eastern corner of Turkey, an astonishing discovery was being made – one that stretched the story of humanity back more than 12,000 years.

Still today, only about 5 per cent of the archaeological site known as Karahantepe has been excavated – but even that tiny fraction is changing our understanding of the beginning of society as we know it. Emerging from the earth is a giant chamber with 11 huge stone phallus columns, overlooked by the face of a man with a splendid handlebar moustache and the body of a snake. The head of a big cat is visible in the centre, and carvings on 250 obelisks in the area could be mistaken for gargoyles on any medieval cathedral. We expect the female equivalent of the chamber to be unearthed soon.



The ancient archaeological site of Karahantepe in south-eastern Turkey is still largely unexcavated

Karahantepe, it turns out, is just one site in a constellation of a hundred or so – the Taş Tepeler – which together are rewriting the story of human collaboration. The orthodoxy used to be that hunter-gatherers invented farming, then settled down, then manifested religion to establish common mores to live by. But the discoveries seem to show that hunter-gatherers and the very first farmers gathered together in huge, collective spaces for wild ritual parties to share know-how and ideas.

This is one of the joys of history: it is constantly protean. Every year, new finds reveal earlier and earlier evidence of human achievement and sophistication.

Bettany Hughes is a historian, author and broadcaster. Her latest book is *The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World* (W&N, 2024)

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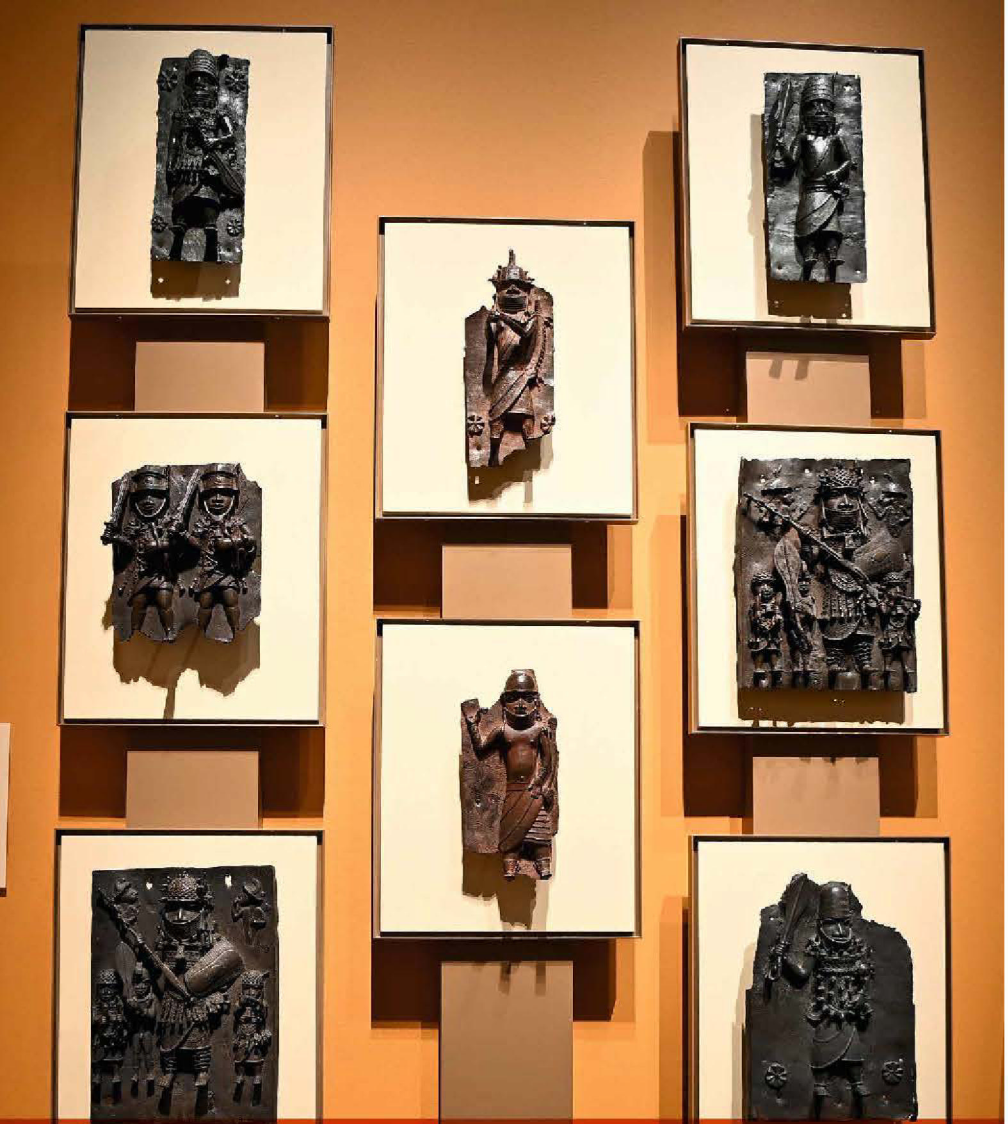

A collection of Benin Bronzes – objects stolen by British troops in 1897 – displayed in the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, DC in 2022 before repatriation to Nigeria

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8 Returning stolen artefacts to Africa is no longer a naive dream

BY **GUS CASELY-HAYFORD**

Some 25 years ago, when I was starting my career in museums, a sense of optimism and renewal imbued the sector – yet the restitution of stolen African objects did not seem a realistic possibility. Today, the culture has changed profoundly. My old employer, the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art in Washington, DC, has returned its contested Benin plaques; the Dutch, Germans and French have either begun programmes of return or discussed the possibility. In Britain, the Horniman has returned ownership of its Benin plaques, and the V&A and the British Museum (both restricted by law from giving collections permanently) have entered into long-term loan agreements with the Asante royal family in Ghana.

Conversations that were inconceivable a generation ago – about ethics, about custodianship, about narrative, about ghosts – have begun to happen. We have to find ways to tell complex stories of empire, enslavement and colonialism more effectively and inclusively. It's important that museums can craft their curatorial narratives with moral confidence, and the resolution of such thorny, long-term issues is vital.

There is still much to do. Our museums must go further in building partnerships and programmes with museums across the African continent. We need to learn from African expertise – and in turn we must share our resources and expertise to improve the telling of these rich and amazing histories everywhere.

Gus Casely-Hayford is a curator, historian and broadcaster. His books include *The Lost Kingdoms of Africa* (Bantam, 2012)

9 Anne Boleyn was a proto-feminist heroine

BY **ALISON WEIR**

Anne Boleyn is unique among English queens, and her story is remarkable, but much of the modern fascination with that tale lies in perceptions of her fuelled by films and novels. She is now revered as a feminist heroine – a concept I would once have dismissed as anachronistic. When I said as much to the historian Sarah Gristwood, she replied: "Well, actually…" and very generously allowed me a preview of her research for her marvellous book *Game of Queens* (Oneworld, 2016), which inspired me to find out more.

Feminism was unknown in Tudor England. But in early 16th-century Europe, where Anne spent her formative years, there was an intellectual debate that questioned traditional attitudes to women, and looked forward to an era – the 'reign of virtue' – in which they would enjoy more power and equality.

In this age of female rulers, Anne had two shining examples to study: Margaret of Austria and Marguerite of Valois, both of whom she served or knew. We have to study her in this European context in order to understand the cultural influences to which she was exposed, giving her the confidence to pursue her brilliant career.

Alison Weir is an author and historian. Her latest book is *The Cardinal: The Secret Life of Thomas Wolsey* (Headline, 2025)

British-Jamaican nurse Mary Seacole, who cared for sick and wounded troops in Crimea. Digitisation of sources helped Helen Rappaport paint a more rounded portrait of her

ALAMY

10 Mary Seacole was a true heroine of the Crimean War

BY **HELEN RAPPAPORT**

One of the most significant changes over the past 25 years is the extent to which researching and writing black history has opened up. This is partly down to the dedication of historians determined to extend knowledge of the black experience by digging deeply and stubbornly into little-consulted sources.

In my own case, 20 years of concerted searching across digitised newspapers and in genealogical archives gave the lie to the till-then widely perpetuated view that Mary Seacole had been wildly overrated and undeserving of the 'Greatest Black Briton' sobriquet awarded her in 2004.

For decades, detractors dismissed her as a colourful but largely irrelevant presence who had done little more than 'sell tea and buns' to the soldiers in Crimea. But my searches, enabled by digitisation of sources, brought me to a more complete view of a woman who deserves to be viewed as a heroine. She journeyed 1,600 miles to Crimea under her own steam and at her own expense to set up shop in the middle of a war zone – a lone black woman facing prejudice and risking her own safety to help the wounded, sick and dying.

Delving into previously unseen sources over an extended period enabled me to challenge the conventional sanctification of 'the black Florence Nightingale' and present a fully rounded personality.

Helen Rappaport is an author and historian. Her latest book is *The Rebel Romanov* (Simon & Schuster, 2025)

A re-enactor at a recreation of a medieval German monastery village. Such projects contribute to public – and academic – understanding of the past

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11 Public history can play a major role in understanding the past

BY **MICHAEL WOOD**

One great change over the last 25 years has been the huge growth in public history – not just as an academic discipline, though of course it rests on the work of professional historians, archivists and museum workers.

Public history is the product of us all. It is about public interaction with the past, its interpretation and popularisation – changing our understanding not only of the past but also of our own times. It's about the link between historians and the general public. Films, podcasts, radio, heritage societies, living archaeologists, local history and re-enactment groups – even readers of this magazine – are all part of it.

Good popularisation is the necessary link between professionals and the population at large, without which history becomes a closed debate between historians. And in a democracy, that link is vital: it's part of a healthy information ecosystem, our reality check in the face of the tide of fake history on social media. Perhaps not surprisingly, in Trump's America the US National Council on Public History is becoming more important in keeping minds open. When I hear people argue that you can't rewrite history – though that is our actual collective job as makers of history! – it makes me think that perhaps we should have one here, too.

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. Read his latest column for *BBC History Magazine* on page 17

12 Charles I wasn't so *very* chaste

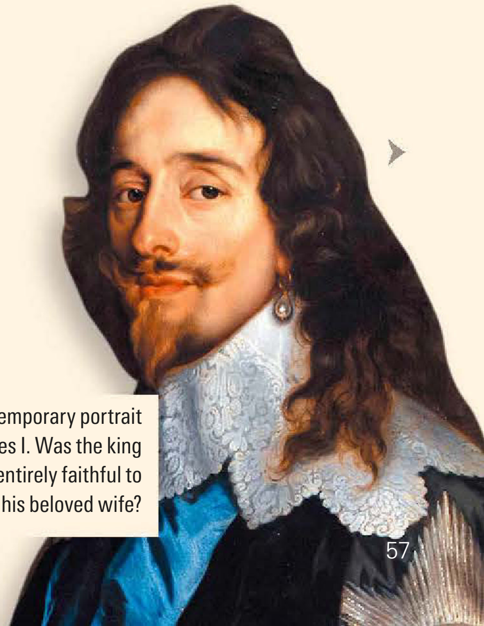
BY **MARK STOYLE**

Traditional accounts of Charles I, the so-called 'martyr king', have always presented him as a grave, austere and chaste figure – the very opposite of his indecorous, bawdy father, James VI & I, and his dissipated, promiscuous son, Charles II. Charles's marriage to his wife, Henrietta Maria, was undoubtedly a happy one and, until the royal couple were torn apart during the Civil War, he does indeed appear to have remained true to her alone.

However, in an article published in 2006, the historian Sarah Poynting revisited a series of encrypted letters written by Charles in late 1647 and 1648, while he was imprisoned in Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight after his defeat by the parliamentarians. Previous attempts to decipher these letters had not been entirely accurate, Poynting showed, and in fact one of them revealed that Charles had been attempting to inveigle the royalist agent Jane Whorwood into his bed.

Using the frankest language, Charles went so far as to suggest to Jane that she should secretly conceal herself in the 'stool-room' adjoining his chamber while he was out on his daily walk so that, after his return, he could dally with her at length. It was a remarkable discovery – and one that suggested previous characterisations of the king as "blamelessly uxorious" may well have been a little wide of the mark.

Mark Stoyle is professor of history at the University of Southampton. His latest book is *A Murderous Midsummer: The Western Rising of 1549* (Yale University Press, 2022)



A contemporary portrait of Charles I. Was the king not entirely faithful to his beloved wife?

A reconstruction of 10,000-year-old Cheddar Man shows features revealed by DNA analysis

13 Mesolithic Europeans had dark skin and blue eyes

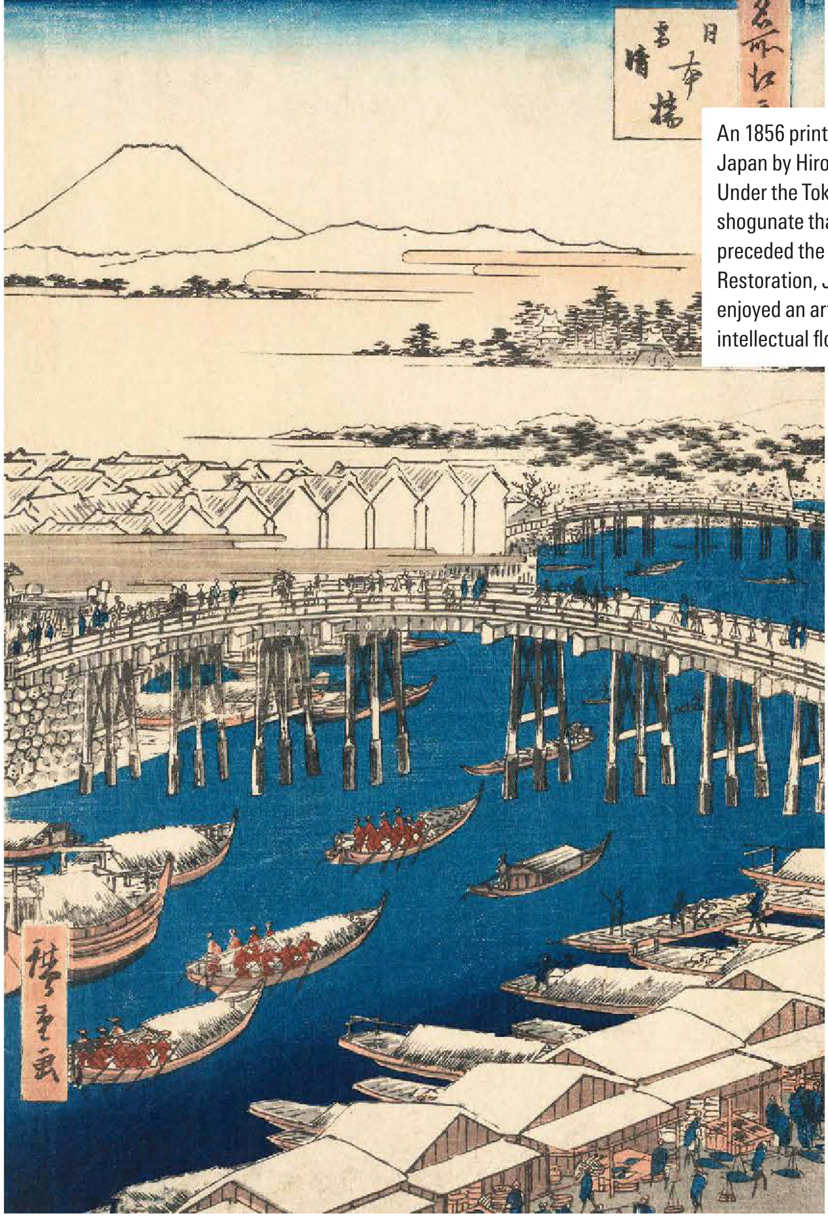
BY **SUSAN GREANEY**

One of the major scientific advances in archaeology over the past 25 years has been the ability to extract and analyse DNA from the remains of long-dead people from the distant past. Such ancient DNA can shed light on how people were related to one another, on a family or population scale, and provide insights into the migration and movement of people over time. It can also tell us what diseases they had and – perhaps most compelling – what they looked like.

In 2018, researchers at the Natural History Museum revealed that one of the inhabitants of Mesolithic Britain, a man who lived around 10,000 years ago, had dark skin and blue eyes. This individual – known as 'Cheddar Man', because his remains were discovered in a cave in Cheddar Gorge in Somerset – is represented by one of the oldest complete skeletons ever identified in Britain. Earlier results from remains found from Spain, Luxembourg and Hungary confirm that most hunter-gatherers in Mesolithic Europe looked this way.

The genes for lighter skin pigmentation arrived thousands of years later, in waves of migration from the east during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. In addition, natural selection over time favoured lighter tones that allow more Vitamin D synthesis in the skin, essential in northerly climes.

Susan Greaney is a lecturer in archaeology at the University of Exeter



An 1856 print of rural Japan by Hiroshige. Under the Tokugawa shogunate that preceded the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Japan enjoyed an artistic and intellectual flourishing

14 Premodern Japan was surprisingly progressive

BY **CHRISTOPHER HARDING**

One of the most fascinating and dynamic periods of Japanese history was the Meiji Restoration, which began with the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate in 1868 and ended with the death of the Meiji Emperor in 1912. Japan opened up as never before to diplomatic and trading relationships with the west and, over little more than four decades, modernised its economy and society at an astonishing rate. By 1912, it had become one of the world's great powers.

For a long time, this explosion of activity was contrasted with the preceding 250 years of the Tokugawa shogunate. That system was regarded as feudal, backward and badly out of date, requiring rescue at the hands of modernising and westernising reformers. Much though this view of history suited western historians across the 20th century, and flattering as it was to western modernity, since 2000 historians have increasingly been exploring the myriad achievements of the shogunate.

Across two and a half centuries of peace, Japanese commerce, intellectual life and the arts enjoyed extraordinary growth and creativity, from theatre through to a tourism industry and a publishing boom. Without the commercial and technical expertise, high literacy rates and great bustling cities that developed under the shogunate, the Meiji Restoration could not have happened in the way that it did.

Christopher Harding is senior lecturer in Asian history at the University of Edinburgh and creator of the IlluminAsia newsletter and podcast (*illuminasia.org*). His latest book is *The Light of Asia: A History of Western Fascination with the East* (Allen Lane, 2024)

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15 Egypt's great pyramids at Giza weren't built by foreign slaves

BY **ISLAM ISSA**

Dominating the Giza Plateau for almost five millennia, the great pyramids still capture imaginations around the world. For centuries, archaeologists and historians have tried to determine how these magnificent monuments, including the only surviving Wonder of the Ancient World, were created – and now we know who built them.

Contrary to popular depictions, construction wasn't completed by foreign slaves but by Egyptian employees. Excavations of a workers' village over the past couple of decades, and the discovery of builders' tombs in 2009, have transformed the narrative.

The village, dating from the Fourth Dynasty (starting c4,600 years ago), boasted bakeries, breweries, butchers and a hospital. In the burial sites, skeletons show signs of hard labour, as one might expect, but they're also accompanied by jars of bread and beer, ready for the afterlife. There are female skeletons, too, confirming that women played roles in building the pyramids.

Hieroglyphs suggest a system of skilled labourers and artisans, from "overseer of the side of the pyramid" to "inspector of the craftsmen". It's also clear that villagers from surrounding areas came here to work in construction, usually in three-month stints. Their graffiti indicates that each cadre might associate themselves with one particular pharaoh or pyramid: the "friends of Khufu", for example, or "drunkards of Menkaure".

The inspirations confirm that the pyramid builders were Egyptian. And the manner and location of the burials, in the shadow of the great pharaohs, puts the slave myth to bed.

Islam Issa is professor of literature and history at Birmingham City University. His latest book is *Alexandria: The City that Changed the World* (Sceptre, 2023)

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Indian troops in France, 1914. Historians and schools are discussing the British empire afresh

16 Personal links to empire can reshape old narratives

BY **KAVITA PURI**

Astonishingly, I completed my entire education without learning about the British empire. I don't even have a recollection of hearing the world 'empire' mentioned at school – and I studied History A-level! I now know that my experience is not unique.

In the past 10 years or so, though, I have gained a growing understanding of not only what happened and how it shaped Britain today, but also of my own personal connection to empire and its tumultuous end. I feel lucky to be making programmes and writing books at a time when there is a greater interest in knowing about Britain's imperial past – not that it is without complications or controversies.

And things continue changing: a new generation of historians is exploring archives and asking different questions. Teachers are choosing to explore empire in all its complexity, and conversations are being had between people in the diaspora and their family members about a time when they were subjects of empire. I am learning that, just because an area of history is overlooked or not spoken of, it doesn't always have to be that way.

Kavita Puri is a journalist and broadcaster for BBC Radio 4. Read her latest *Hidden Histories* column on page 18

17 Stonehenge was built in an already sacred area

BY **DAVID KEYS**

The past two and a half decades have seen a transformation in our understanding of one of the most iconic ancient monuments in Britain and, indeed, the world: Stonehenge.

Archaeological research has revealed that the 4,500-year-old prehistoric 'temple' stood at the heart of a sacred landscape infinitely richer than previously thought. Scores of ritual monuments have been discovered in a vast halo scattered across the countryside around the monument.

Even more extraordinarily, tests have revealed that one of Stonehenge's most important stones was transported all the way from what's now northern Scotland – and that a large number of the smaller stones had probably originally formed part of another stone circle in south-west Wales before being brought here. And research shows that some of the Neolithic people buried at Stonehenge did not come from the area but from western Britain, possibly from modern-day Wales – significant, given the origins of many of its smaller stones.

We now know, too, that Mesolithic hunter-gatherers were active in the Stonehenge area some 5,000 years before the monument existed.

This remarkable new information, together with earlier evidence that a series of Mesolithic wooden obelisks may have stood adjacent to the site of Stonehenge, suggests that the area had been sacred for millennia.

David Keys is the archaeological correspondent for *The Independent*

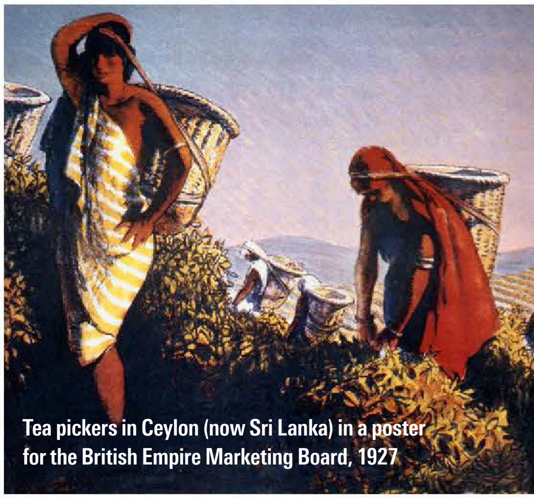
18 The tide seems to have turned against the British empire

BY **DENIS JUDD**

By the year 2000, the British empire – formerly a global superpower – had been transformed into an organisation with entirely voluntary membership, the Commonwealth. At the time, academic assessment of this extraordinary transformation resulted in a number of books – including my own – which concluded that British imperialism had been overall, and in a remarkable variety of ways, both a blessing and a curse.

In the 25 years since that relatively benign consensus, however, there has been a profound anti-imperial swing resulting in a wholesale condemnation of British imperial history – shifting the dial remarkably.

It is, however, vital to understand that, even at its Victorian zenith, the empire faced trenchant criticism from within. Anti-imperial attitudes were commonplace on the left wing of the Liberal Party, the infant Labour Party and the generally hostile Irish Nationalist Party. Nonconformist churches – Methodists, Congregationalists and, above all, Quakers – voiced criticisms of imperial aims and methods. Internal opposition, from resentful Afrikaners, French Canadians and diverse displaced and conquered Indigenous peoples, also inevitably arose.



Tea pickers in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in a poster for the British Empire Marketing Board, 1927

To cope with such internal opposition, and to prolong its existence, the imperial system undertook much self-correction – a process that led to mass devolution, the end of empire and the birth of today's Commonwealth. In short, we are now keenly aware that there is no neat and fireproof analysis of the nature, governance and purpose of the British empire. It was such a huge, complex and long-lived organisation that almost every criticism, as well as almost every justification, has some validity somewhere and at some time.

Denis Judd is professor emeritus of imperial and Commonwealth history at London Metropolitan University, and author of *Empire* (IB Tauris revised paperback edition, 2012)

19 The world is in danger of reverting to its darkest days

BY **NIGEL JONES**

After the collapse of Soviet-style communism in Russia and eastern Europe in 1989–91, the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama wrote a book called *The End of History and the Last Man*. In it, he predicted optimistically that the demise of the Soviet system meant that western liberalism would roll out across the world, and that the future belonged to progressive democracy, with no rivals to challenge it.

In fact, since the first issue of *BBC History Magazine* was published in 2000, history has evolved along a drastically different path to the one that Fukuyama predicted. So far, the 21st century has belonged to resurgent strongmen. In country after country, authoritarian regimes led by dictatorial rulers have come to power – and stayed there, with scant regard for democracy. Putin's Russia, Xi's China, Erdogan's Turkey, Kim's North Korea and Sisi's Egypt are leading examples of a worldwide trend that shows no sign of ending.

So what we have learned from history in this century is a rather troubling lesson. After the terrors of the 20th century, the world is not moving into broad, sunlit uplands but is in danger of reverting to the darkest days of the past.

Security cameras in Shanghai, 2024. "The world is not moving into broad, sunlit uplands," says Nigel Jones

Nigel Jones is a historian, journalist and former reviews editor of *BBC History Magazine*. His latest book is *Kitty's Salon: Sex, Spying and Surveillance in the Third Reich* (John Blake, 2023)

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Ernest Shackleton's polar vessel *Endurance* clamped in a fatal ice embrace in 1915. The discovery of its wreck on the Antarctic seabed in 2022 made headlines

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20 Technology enables deep-sea shipwreck discoveries – but we should beware hubris

BY **CLAIRE JOWITT**

In recent years, sophisticated modern technologies have allowed humans to dive deeper, explore the seabed autonomously, and locate shipwrecks. Lost in 1915 in the Weddell Sea, Sir Ernest Shackleton's polar vessel *Endurance* made headlines when its wreck was rediscovered in 2022. Recovering or even visiting the wreck, which lies at a depth of 3,000 metres, are major challenges. But submersible robots were able to photograph the *Endurance* from every angle, enabling scientists to create a digital model of the whole vessel as well as many artefacts preserved just as they were when the crew abandoned ship.

The wreck of the *Gloucester*, lost in 1682 after hitting a sandbank while transporting James, Duke of York and his court, was discovered in 2007. Future excavation of the site could provide an unprecedented opportunity to explore a Restoration royal court frozen in time. Just as the Mary Rose Museum has captured the public imagination, making Henry VIII's warship part of British national conversations, telling the *Gloucester*'s stories could transform public understanding of a historical period that laid the constitutional foundations of modern Britain.

In 2025, mid-point in the United Nations 'Ocean Decade', a key task is to meaningfully integrate Britain's remarkable maritime cultural heritage into ocean governance to help create a sustainable blue economy.

Nonetheless, humanity should remain humble in the face of the ocean's uncontrollable forces. The implosion in 2023 of the submersible *Titan* on its expedition to the wreck of the *Titanic* – resulting in the death of all on board – is a cautionary tale. Some 3 million shipwrecks around the world prove that the sea – so elemental, so powerful – shouldn't be disrespected.

Claire Jowitt is professor of Renaissance studies at the University of East Anglia

21 We now know how many enslaved African people were trafficked across the Atlantic

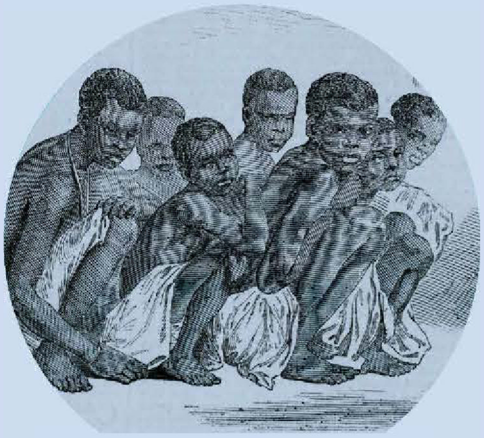
BY **HANNAH CUSWORTH**

The transatlantic slave trade was one of the largest forced movements of people in world history – yet for decades it was difficult to quantify. Then, in the early 1990s, an international team came together to solve this problem. The result was the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, which showed that 12.5 million people were transported. Of those, 10.7 million survived the journey and arrived in the Americas.

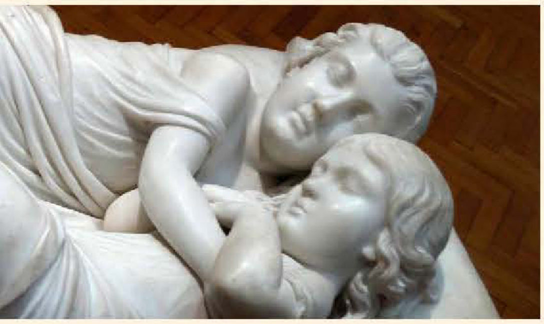
Many people, particularly in the US and the UK, assumed that most enslaved people were trafficked to the United States. In fact, the database showed that fewer than 400,000 Africans were forcibly taken directly to mainland North America; about 4.8 million arrived in South America and 4.7 million in the Caribbean.

First published as a CD-ROM in 1999, the database was greatly expanded in the early 2000s to include the Portuguese trade in the South Atlantic. Re-released as an open-access website in 2008, including details of an additional 7,000 journeys, it has been described as one of the greatest historical achievements of the 21st century. Though the database does not give us a rich picture of the experiences of enslaved peoples, it has been critical to understanding the scale of one of the world's worst human-rights violations.

Hannah Cusworth is a historian, curator and history education consultant



Enslaved African people on a slave ship, 1857. An ambitious database project quantifies the trade



An 1862 marble sculpture of the ill-fated princes. Was Richard III responsible for their deaths?

22 Richard III was behind the disappearance of the princes in the Tower… probably

BY **TRACY BORMAN**

It's history's most compelling missing persons case: what happened to Edward V and his younger brother, Richard, after they were placed in the Tower in 1483 on the orders of their uncle, who soon afterwards seized the throne as Richard III?

The mystery has been the subject of intense debate ever since. Some three decades later, Thomas More had established the narrative that Richard had his nephews murdered with the help of his henchman, James Tyrell. There was no shortage of other suspects but, though every scrap of evidence has been pored over by generations of historians since, the trail was already cold.

Recently, Tim Thornton, professor of history at the University of Huddersfield, took a novel approach. Rather than researching the events leading up to the princes' disappearance, he traced the lives of those involved in the years that followed – and found links between Thomas More and the two men he claimed had carried out the murder for Tyrell. Then, last year, Thornton came across a book of wills in the National Archives that included one made in 1516 by a wealthy London widow, Margaret Capel, half sister-in-law of Sir James Tyrell. Among her chattels listed in the will was "the chain of Edward V" – the only one of the boys' possessions referenced in sources after their disappearance. The fact that it turned up in the family of the prime suspect makes it close to a 'smoking gun'.

Tracy Borman is a historian, author and broadcaster. Her documentary *The Princes in the Tower: A Damning Discovery* is on My5

An archaeologist with a cannonball at the Waterloo battle site. Undertaking archaeological research on battlefields can, it's been discovered, have mental health benefits for war veterans

23 History can help veterans cope with PTSD

BY **ANDREW ROBERTS**

A remarkable discovery made this century is that history can be hugely therapeutic for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It might seem deeply counterintuitive but when veterans undertake top-level archaeological research on battlefields, rather than re-igniting their traumas it often tends to work in positive ways for them psychologically, and can be a useful step on their road to recovery.

The work done by the organisation Waterloo Uncovered, founded in 2015 by former Coldstream Guards captain (and PTSD sufferer) Mark Evans, has been instrumental in this regard. Its mental-health experts found that, after helping to discover facts that are useful to military historians – the musket-ball scatter-pattern outside the orchard at the Hougoumont farmhouse in a key sector of the Waterloo battlefield, for example – veterans often saw improvements in their mental conditions.

There are various theories about the mechanisms of this effect. Perhaps such work reminds veterans that their predecessors two centuries ago encountered much the same kind of perils they did themselves in war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Evans also noted that the project provided a safe and structured environment in which veterans with shared experiences could start to open up to one another about the challenges they faced. Whatever the reason, history is helping in a tangible way today.

Andrew Roberts' latest book, with General David Petraeus, is *Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Gaza* (William Collins, 2024)

ALAMY/CHRIS VAN HOUTS

24 Technology has revolutionised how historians work and collaborate

BY **PETER FRANKOPAN**

One of the great things about historical research is that it keeps on moving.

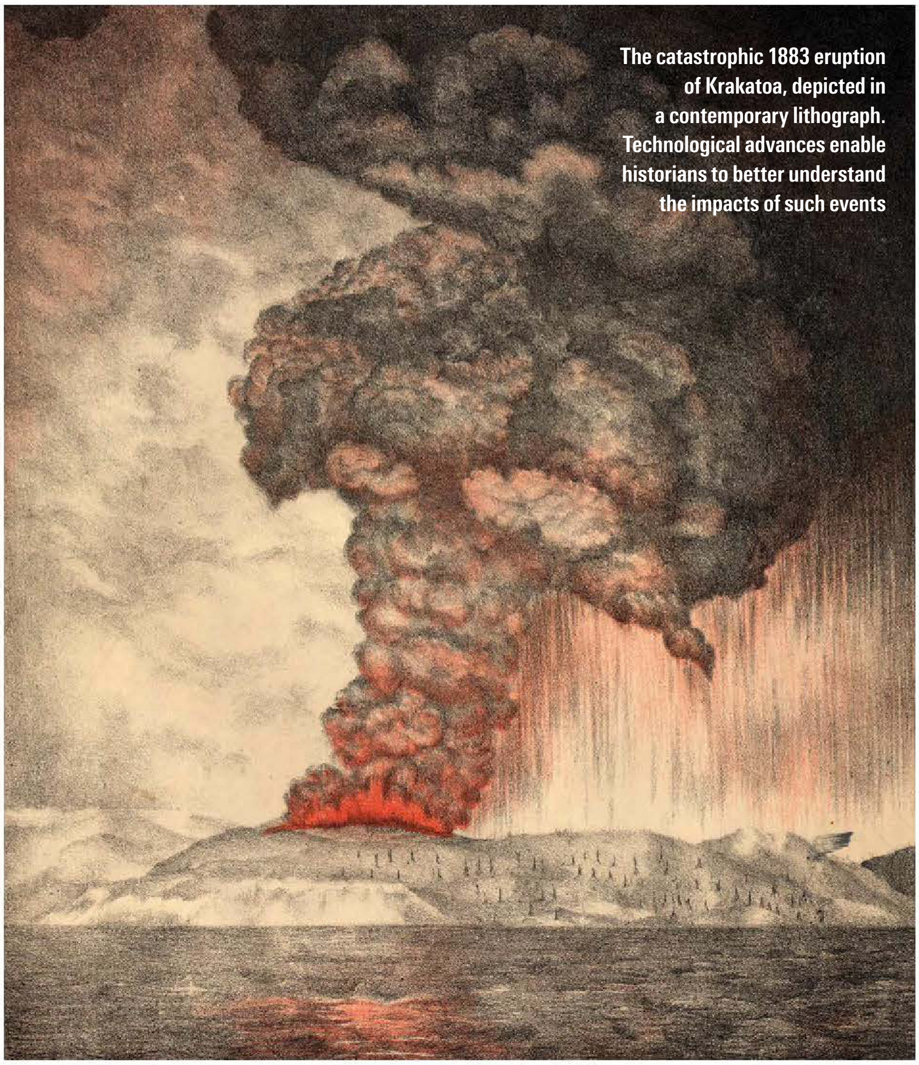
When I was a young historian, looking back in time required me to handle complex written materials and work out how to supplement them with reference material culture, to archaeology or to finds such as coins and lead seals.

The past quarter-century has revolutionised the tools available to historians. Huge advances in the sciences, combined with plunging costs, mean that we now have access to data sources that don't just provide new insights into topics such as human migration or the spread and lethality of pandemic diseases, but also enable us to do so with increasing accuracy. These are tools we must learn to rely on.

Many of these new materials are related to climate archives, enabling historians to reconstruct past periods of environmental change – or even, in some cases, to better understand the effects of single, one-off extreme events such as floods, storms or volcanic eruptions.

That, in turn, has changed how historians work, not least in the ways we can collaborate more often and more meaningfully with colleagues across research groups. It's an incredibly exciting time to be a historian – to be part of the community of people interested in the past.

Peter Frankopan is professor of global history at Oxford University. His latest book is *The Earth Transformed: An Untold History* (Bloomsbury, 2023)



The catastrophic 1883 eruption of Krakatoa, depicted in a contemporary lithograph. Technological advances enable historians to better understand the impacts of such events

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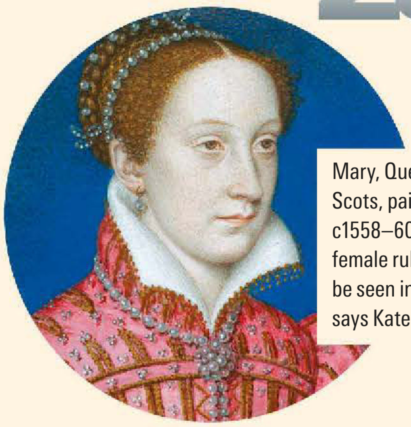


Mary, Queen of Scots, painted c1558–60. Historical female rulers must be seen in context, says Kate Williams

25 Powerful female leaders weren't the sex-crazed failures of (manmade) myth

BY **KATE WILLIAMS**

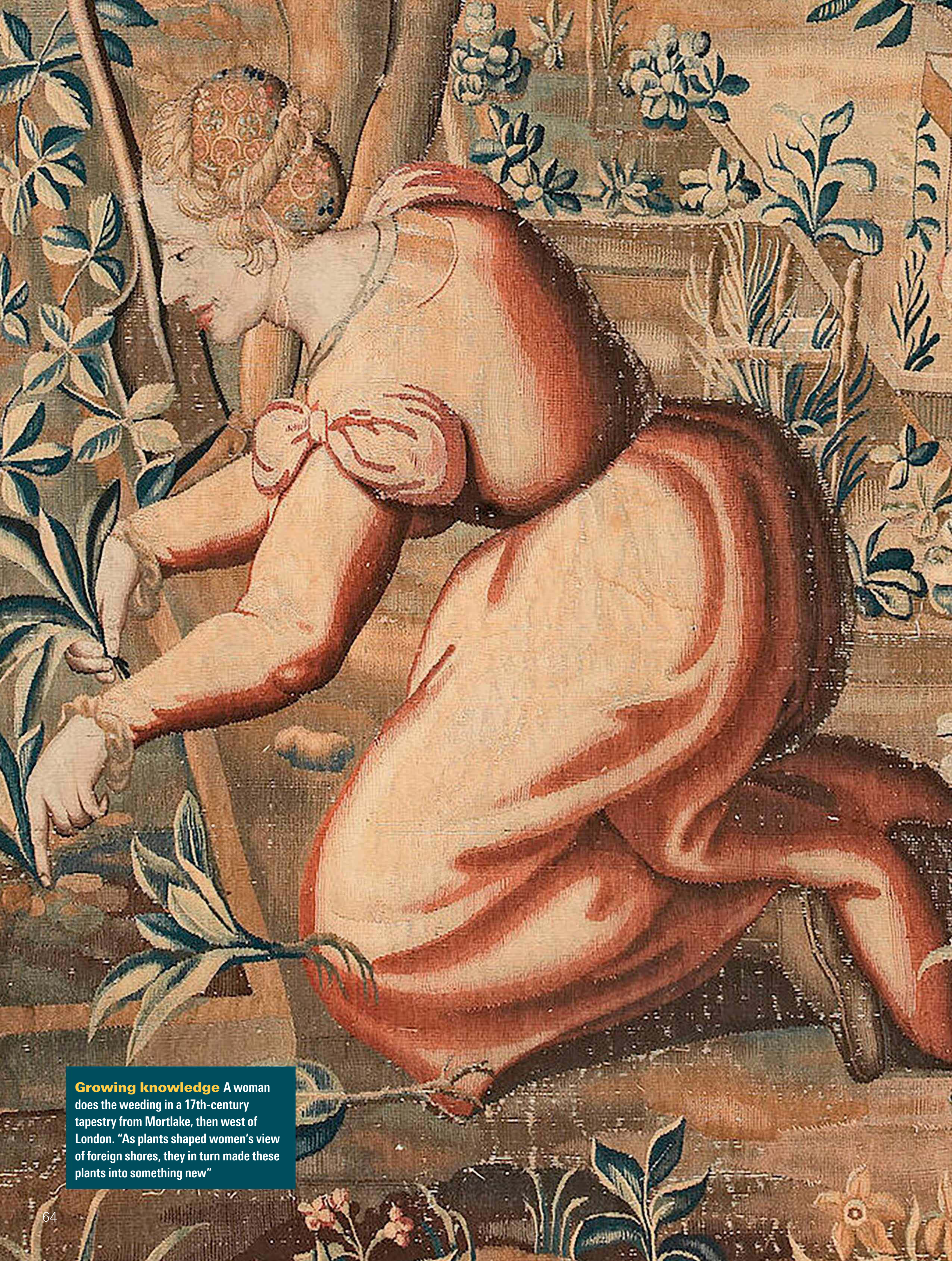
Our understanding of queenship has, thankfully, moved forward in the past 25 years – just as women's history has also moved forward.

Female rulers such as Cleopatra and Mary, Queen of Scots have all too frequently been cited as cautionary tales about what follows when you give women power: sex and death. But in recent years, revisionist historians such as Kara Cooney, Joyce Tyldesley and Joann Fletcher have written brilliant accounts of Cleopatra, challenging the perception of her as a sex-mad failure.

Mary, Queen of Scots was surrounded by men attempting to seize her power – and, when she had a son, she was set on a course that led to her being deposed in favour of him. Lord Bothwell made her go back to his castle, where he assaulted her in an attempt to force her to marry. Past historians framed her for setting up this event. Today, though, we understand that a woman who had been seized and sexually assaulted was expected to agree to marry the man who attacked her. In Mary's case, all of the lords were in agreement with that course of action – so what choice did Mary have?

As we are increasingly coming to understand, female rulers need to be seen in context. If they lost to the powerful men of the time or, indeed, the Roman empire, we need to grasp why that happened. Such insights can shape perceptions of the past – and a future with women in power. H

Kate Williams is professor of public engagement with history at the University of Reading. Her latest book is *The Royal Palaces: Secrets and Scandals* (Frances Lincoln, 2024)



Growing knowledge A woman does the weeding in a 17th-century tapestry from Mortlake, then west of London. "As plants shaped women's view of foreign shores, they in turn made these plants into something new"

Flower power

Few 17th-century women could travel the world. But the world could visit them in their gardens. **Susannah Lyon-Whaley** reveals how exotic plants – from Chinese rhubarb to South American passionfruit – opened new horizons in fashion, food and science

GARDEN MUSEUM/DREAMSTIME/
ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES

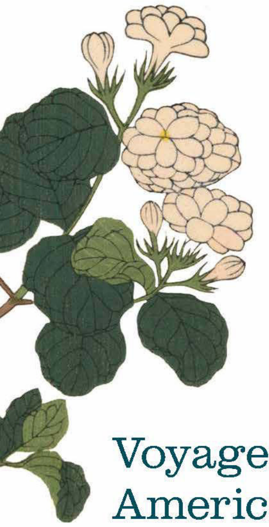
Anna Buckett had never seen a pineapple. Undeterred, on 12 July 1656, she took the bold move of stitching one. While the fine stitches on her sampler ① show dexterity, the result is more artistic than realistic. The red pineapple looks a little like a monstrous jelly with beetle legs. Amid Anna's stitched pinks, pansies and honeysuckles, the pineapple – a native of countries like Brazil and Suriname that would not grow successfully in English gardens until the 1700s – was out of place.

She had never seen a pineapple, but Anna may have seen pictures. The first printed depiction of a pineapple in Europe was in black and white in Gonzalo de Oviedo's *Historia General de las Indias* (1535). Another herbal text (1641) claimed that the fruit tasted "as if wine, rosewater and sugar were mixed together".

Anna may have been the Anne Buckett baptised in May 1643 in Middlesex, or the Ann Becket baptised in December 1644 in Surrey, though neither is certain. Like other daughters of merchants or gentlemen learning the gentler arts, she stitched both gardens she saw and those she imagined. Needlework creations of the time swarmed with peacocks, parrots, lions, leopards and sunflowers from foreign lands.

In the 17th century, voyages to new colonies in North America, the Caribbean, Africa and India turned plants like tobacco and sugarcane into profits. They also sent waves of plants rippling back across the sea. For women at home, gardens made the wider world a material reality.

Women of all classes wore the scents of plants such as jasmine, shown in a coloured engraving, during the 17th century



Dainties for a queen

In 1629, John Parkinson, royal herbalist to Charles I, dedicated his new book of flowers, *Paradisi in Sole* ②, to the king's wife, 20-year-old French-born Henrietta Maria. "Knowing your maiestie so much delighted with all the faire flowers of a garden," the work "seemed as it were destined, to bee first offered into your highnesse hands."

The more exotic and 'outlandish' a flower, the more fashionable. The potatoes of Canada with their small yellow blooms, wrote Parkinson, were once stewed with butter and wine as "dainties for a queene". But by 1629 these were "growne to be so common here with us at London, that even the most vulgar begin to despise them".

Paradisi in Sole was a gateway to further knowledge for 'gentlewomen', and Parkinson urged such women to look, smell and taste in their own domestic gardens. The crown imperial from Constantinople "doe smell somewhat strong as it were the savour of a Foxe". Tulip bulbs tasted like "sweete onions". The West Indian "daffodil with a red flower" was "by the Indians in their tongue named Azcal Xochitl".

Flowers introduced new smellscapes as well as sights. The scent of orange flowers – originally grown in China – in perfumed waters was favoured by ladies and queens, even if the orange fruit could be sold in playhouses by girls of dubious reputation. In a Dutch still life painting by Pieter Claesz dated 1627, a dead turkey baked into a pie clutches a sprig of orange blossom in its beak. On a table set with Chinese porcelain, a Pacific nautilus shell and Indian spices, the blossom is just one of many exotica.

Voyages to North America, the Caribbean, Africa and India sent waves of plants rippling back across the sea

Sweet-smelling nasturtiums from the West Indies decked small bunches that a woman might present to a friend or receive from a lover. Blooms like jasmine, orange blossom and the delicate white flowers of the Mexican tuberose perfumed women from princesses to sex workers.

A satire on a lady's dressing room by Mary Evelyn in 1690 described gloves scented with such fragrances. In the poem *Pendragon, or, The Carpet Knight his Kalendar* (1698), the knight follows Selena to church, only to be overwhelmed by "a whiff of tuberose" emanating from "her skin or clothes". A scent bottle from the Cheapside hoard of Elizabethan and Stuart jewels, found in London in 1912, is encrusted with enamel, gold and gems ⑤. Other bottles engraved with oriental-style birds and plants attested to the value of the smells they contained.

Like Anna's pineapple, flowers were sources of artistic inspiration and invited readers to picture foreign places. Elizabeth, Countess of Carnarvon, holds her own painting of a tulip, also known as a 'Turk's cap', in a portrait with her sister Mary Capel, later Duchess of Beaufort ③.

For Mary, flowers were a scientific passion. Plants put her in touch with botanists like Hans Sloane and opened her mind to places she could only read of: the West Indies, China, Japan and Ceylon. Mary kept books of the plants she grew and collected, along with notes including their indigenous names. Among her pressed flowers at the Natural History Museum is a desiccated South American passionfruit "ripen'd at Fairford in Gloucestershire" ④.

As a woman, Mary could not join the Royal Society, the premier organisation for the study of natural history, nor publish work in her name. Yet, in the century of her death it was reported that she was responsible for the introduction of 87 new plants, among them Virginian blush flowered speedwell and Persian bell flowered gigantic swallow wort. One hundred years after she died, botanist Robert Brown named the Western Australian gravel bottlebrush after her: *Beaufortia Decussata*.

Prickly fig trees

But not only duchesses took an interest in botany. "Mistresse Thomasin Tunstall" lived in rural Bull Bank in Lancashire, 5 miles north of Hornby Castle, far from noble courts. Tunstall collected rare native plants like the cuckoo flower and lady slipper orchid. Parkinson noted that she "hath often sent mee up the rootes to London, which have borne faire flowers in my garden".

The marginal notes in Tunstall's copy of botanist John Gerard's famous 'herbal' show her awareness of plants from the wider world. Tunstall noted that Gerard's "Prickly Indian Fig tree" grew at "Mr Parkinson's gardin at the siyne of the goulden morter on Ludyat Hill".

Women worked with these plants – as well as studied and collected them. A bill from the 1680s for Catherine of Braganza, wife of King Charles II, offers rare evidence of women's garden labour. Weeders worked among the queen's sweet-scented tuberoses, Ethiopian bladder senna, purple Virginian honeysuckle, and apios americana

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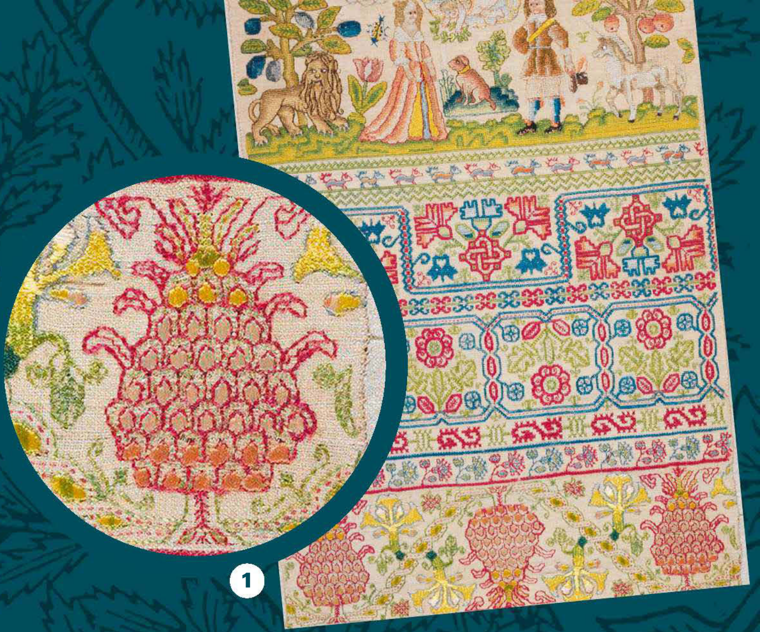


The artist who challenged the natural world Read our article on the incredible Maria Sibylla Merian: *historyextra.com/merian-feature*

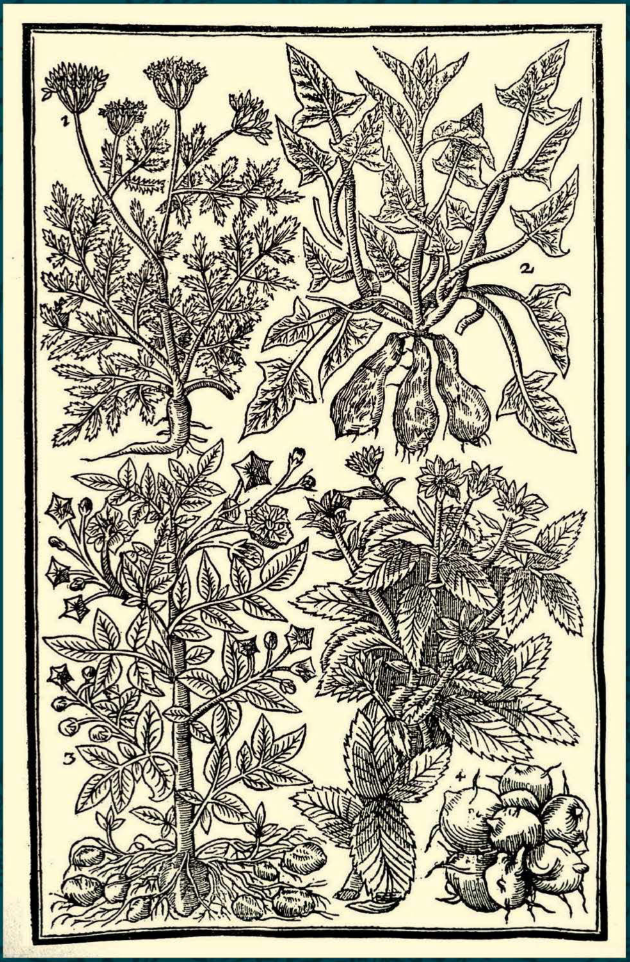
① A needlework sampler stitched by Anna Buckett in 1656, including (inset) her depiction of a red pineapple, resembling a "monstrous jelly with beetle legs"

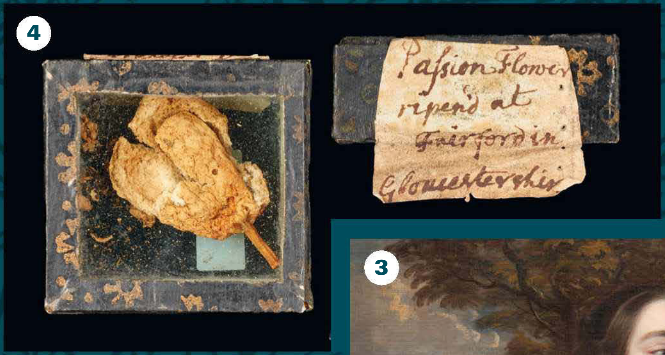
② A page from *Paradisi in Sole*, John Parkinson's 1629 book of flowers dedicated to Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles I. Parkinson urged elite women to smell and taste the blooms in their gardens

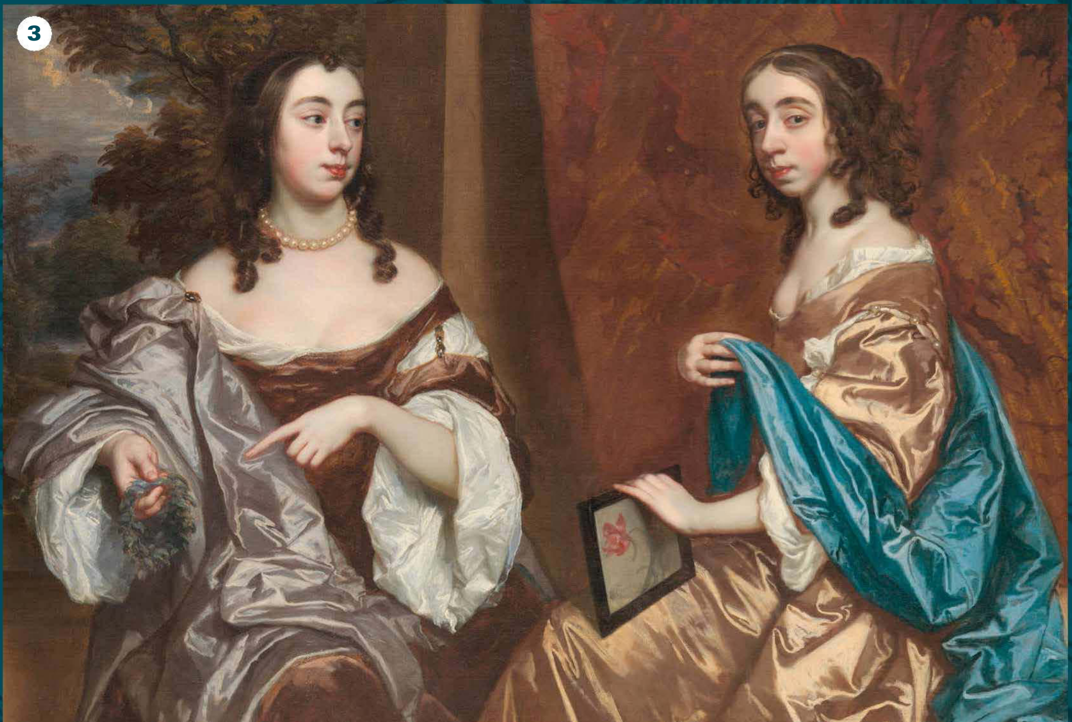
③ A portrait of Mary Capel (left) with her sister Elizabeth (holding a painting of a tulip). Mary was reportedly responsible for the introduction of 87 new plants into England

④ This desiccated South American passionfruit – which belonged to Mary Capel – is now at the Natural History Museum

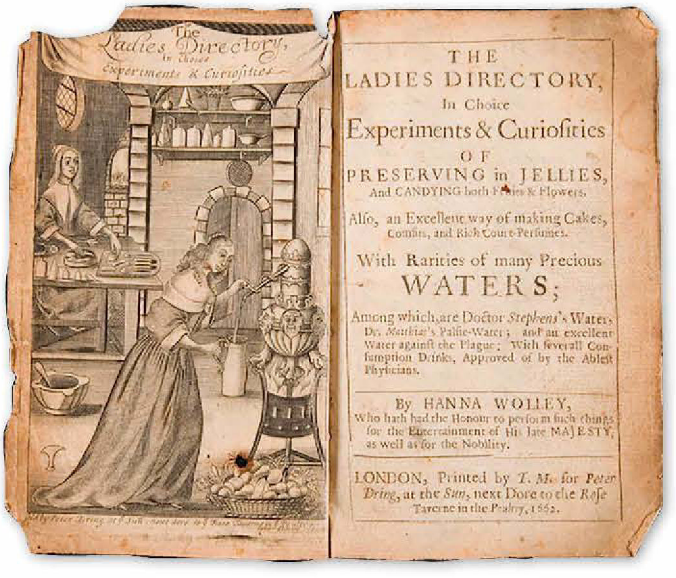
⑤ This perfume bottle, discovered in a hoard of Elizabethan and Stuart jewels, may have contained scents from flowers that originated in Asia







ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM/LONDON MUSEUM



The Ladies Directory, in Choice Experiments & Curioſities

THE
LADIES DIRECTORY,
In Choice
Experiments & Curioſities
OF
PRESERVING in JELLIES,
And CANDYING both Fruits & Flowers.

Alſo, an Excellent way of making Cakes,
Comfits, and Rich Court-Perfumes.

With Rarities of many Precious
WATERS;

Among which, are Doctor *Stephens*'s Water,
Dr. *Matthias*'s Palſie-Water; and an excellent
Water againſt the Plague; With ſeverall Con-
ſumption Drinks, Approved of by the Ableſt
Phyſicians.

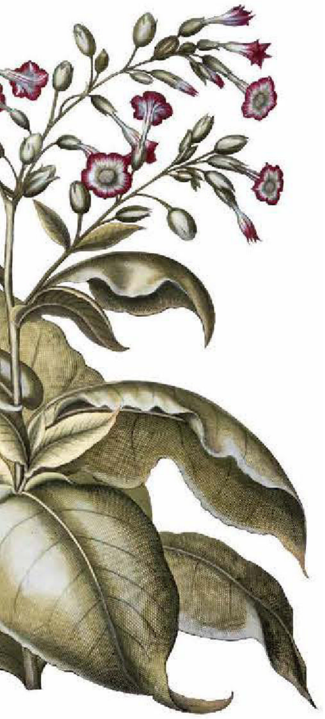
By HANNA WOLLEY,
Who hath had the Honour to perform ſuch things
for the Entertainment of His late MAJESTY,
as well as for the Nobility.

LONDON, Printed by *T. M.* for *Peter*
Dring, at the *Sun*, next Dore to the *Roſe*
Taverne in the *Poultry*, 1662.

Sweet treats *The Ladies Directory* of "experiments and curiosities" from 1662 offers women advice on producing drinks, jellies, candied flowers and cakes

sourced from the keeper of the Chelsea Physic Garden. At least one found love amid the blooms. On 19 August 1688, Katherine Griffin married Thomas Williams – one of the queen's garden labourers – at the Holy Trinity in Knightsbridge and is subsequently listed with the weeding women as Katherine Williams.

Despite being paid 10p a day or £1 a month (roughly £120 today), half as much as the male gardeners whose names are recorded in the same bills, women like Katherine were adept at their tasks. The "garden of pleasure stored with these out-landish flowers… needeth not so much or so often manuring with soyle, as another garden planted with… English flowers," John Parkinson had written in *Paradisi in Sole.* But it did "neede to bee well cleansed from all annoyances… stones, weedes, rootes of trees, bushes". A weeding woman had to know which seedlings to pull. What might she have thought of the unusual plants she was required to treat like "so many jewels"?



The tobacco plant – shown in a 1613 illustration – was grown in English kitchen gardens as a salve for ulcers and wounds

Such work did not go unnoticed. The young noblewoman Celia Fiennes described a statue of an "old weeder woman" in the Duke of Bedford's cherry garden that was "done so like and her clothes so well that at first I tooke it to be a real living body". A Mortlake tapestry (see detail on page 64) pictures a woman weeding. Her clothes, which are not as rich as those worn by a nearby noble couple, suggest she might be the gardener's wife. The daffodils growing beside her were new additions to the decorative garden under names such as 'Narcissus Africanus', the French daffodil, and the 'Daffodill of Constantinople'.

Shining like diamonds

In the garden of pleasure and the adjoining kitchen garden, North American tobacco with its pretty pink flowers became a salve for ulcers and wounds, or a syrup to treat asthma. Manuscript books of recipes compiled by women include "pellitory of Spayne" (likely the North African *Anacyclus pyrethrum*) in a gargle for phlegm and rhubarb from China in laxatives.

Widely read printed recipes called for sugar, the crystallised product of the juice from the sugar cane plant. With its fine white powder, a lady or her maidservant could transform English roses, borage, marigolds or gillyflowers into "candie hard and glistering like diamonds". A humbler conserve of native betony flowers and foreign sugar purporting to aid conception instructed its maker to boil "betony new and tender one pound, the best sugar three pound" until they became a syrup. At the start of the 17th century, sugar was a luxury product. But by the end of the century, plantations established in British colonies like Barbados meant sugar was affordable for the likes of yeoman farmers and their wives.

What might a weeding woman have thought of the unusual plants she was required to treat like "so many jewels"?

But 'exotic' flowers had a darker side. To source specimens, English women relied on imperial trade routes. The Duchess of Beaufort had trees, cuttings and saplings transported from Barbados. One of the ships that transported "poyson trees" for her in 1696 returned to the island in 1702 carrying enslaved people as cargo. Some gentlewomen may have read Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (1657), written to attract sugar planters to the colony. He wrote of a new vegetable root "of which the negres brought the seeds" that was "very good meat" for sea voyages, "boyl'd with powdred pork, and eaten with butter, vinegar, and pepper". Other pages detailed tortures to keep the enslaved African population in check.

How much did women of the time know about their impact on ecologies and people far away? It is difficult to guess. Today, flowers imported to the UK from markets such as Kenya are plagued by instances of modern-day slavery. Are those of us who admire and purchase these travelling beauties, these innocent-looking roses, plastic-wrapped and transported thousands of miles on planes, so different from early modern women?

Few 17th-century English women may have travelled the high seas to foreign climes but many, particularly the educated and wealthy, experienced the wider world through nature's bounty. As plants shaped their view of foreign shores, they in turn made these plants into something new. In their gardens, foreign flowers were moulded into emblems of fashion and art, and exotic plants became perfumes, medicine and food.

When the young Anna Buckett stitched a pineapple, the curious mind of this ordinary girl was encountering a world miles away from her English pinks and pansies. Or was it? Through books or word of mouth, pineapples had entered her own experience.

Susannah Lyon-Whaley is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of York

Susannah's exhibition **A Queen's Book of Flowers** is taking place in June as part of the York Festival of Ideas. For more details, head to *thinicepress.org/exhibitions/a-queens-book-of-flowers* or visit *yorkfestivalofideas.com*

GETTY IMAGES/UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

BOOKS

CULTURAL

“A single page can encompass Edvard Munch’s works alongside the books of CS Lewis”

Douglas Davies on a new history of mourning › page 79

SOCIAL

> “When it comes to free speech, money still talks louder than anything”

David Runciman admires a new take on the history of free expression › page 74

SEX

“American feminists at the crossroads of political enfranchisement demonised sex workers”

Fern Riddell is intrigued by an exploration of the US war on prostitution › page 76

HOAXES

“People often cherry-pick justifications and rationalisations for their existing beliefs”

Joseph E Uscinski enjoys a look at a fake report about a US war conspiracy › page 78

INTERVIEW

Paula Akpan on the often surprising stories of 12 female African leaders

› page 70

DAMIEN MCFADDEN/ALAMY

“Africans have been starved of historical figures from their own lands that they can look up to”

PAULA AKPAN speaks to Danny Bird about powerful African woman leaders and the complexities of interrogating historical narratives, colonial biases and these women’s own flaws

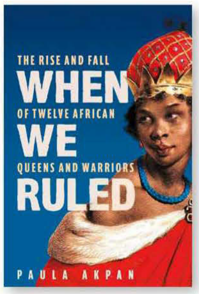
Danny Bird At the heart of your book are a dozen African women, many of whom held immense power and high social standing. Who were they, and when did they live?

Paula Akpan I’ve traced the lives of 12 formidable women over the past millennium. The earliest was Princess Mọrèmí of Offa, who rose to rule in Ilé-Ifẹ̀, in what’s now Nigeria, in the 12th century. From there, we journey through time and across regions, weaving together stories of power, resistance and legacy.

Another key figure is the 17th-century Queen Njinga of Ndongo and Matamba – territories today in northern Angola. A master strategist and diplomatic force, they blurred gender conventions: they insisted on being addressed as both king and queen, asserting their sovereignty in a male-dominated world.

We also encounter Ranavalona I of the kingdom of Imerina, encompassing much of the island of Madagascar. History remembers her as a fearsome ruler vilified even by her own people, largely due to her aggressive stand against Christianity and European imperialism – policies that reportedly resulted in the population of her realm plummeting by half during her reign in the 19th century.

Yet the narrative is not solely about feared rulers. Other women are revered as icons of resistance: Nana Yaa Asantewaa of present-day Ghana, for example, who led the people of the ancient Asante town of Edweso in defiance of British colonisers. Her fight to protect the sacred Golden Stool, a symbol of Asante sovereignty, remains a powerful moment in the anti-colonial struggle.



When We Ruled: The Rise and Fall of Twelve African Queens and Warriors
by Paula Akpan
(Trapeze, 416 pages, £22)

These stories are as varied as the women themselves. Some are celebrated today as symbols of strength and inspiration; others have been pushed to the margins of collective memory, their legacies forgotten or deliberately erased. Ririkumutima of Burundi, for instance, played a pivotal role in shaping key treaties in the early 20th century, yet her childhood home was demolished last century and her story was largely scrubbed from ‘official’ history.

What drew you to these women?

I aimed to conduct in-depth research into specific rulers, ensuring geographical breadth across the continent, while also challenging some of the dominant narratives. Figures such as Nana Yaa Asantewaa are often portrayed as entirely selfless, while the Modjadjis – the Rain Queens of the Balobedu people in South Africa – are shrouded in mystery. I wanted to interrogate these portrayals alongside lesser-known rulers I discovered during my research.

It was also essential that the book not be written solely from London, drawing only on archives or institutions such as SOAS [School of Oriental and African Studies]. My historical work has always aimed to be community-centred. I believe that those whose lives and legacies I’m exploring should be part of the process. It should be a dialogue – a shared conversation.

This is especially important in African history, where there’s a long and harmful legacy of colonial anthropologists and explorers declaring expertise on places they had never visited. I was determined not to replicate that approach. If you’re writing a focused history of a place, it should be expected that you visit the sites you’re referencing.

For instance, in exploring Njinga – their gender expression as well as their political role – I visited a queer organisation in Angola. Speaking with its members gave me insights into how they connect with a historical figure who understood gender in plural terms, yet is often remembered simply as a queen.

I didn’t want to create a neat, linear history. I wanted it to reflect the complexity and richness of the narratives I encountered. That meant engaging with all kinds of voices – historians, storytellers, even taxi drivers – whose everyday recollections and interpretations added depth to the legacies of these rulers.

How are these women remembered by present-day Africans?

Their legacies are far-reaching. But it’s not just about individual rulers; as readers move through the book, I hope they also see it as a broader history of colonisation – western, certainly, but also involving the Ottoman empire. Africans on the continent and, to a lesser extent, those in the diaspora are still grappling with the consequences of colonisation and the decisions made in that Berlin conference room in 1884–85: the division of Africa, the scramble for territory, and the arbitrary borders drawn.

These borders created or reinforced ethnic divisions. Identity cards were introduced in places such as Rwanda and Burundi, and the genocides that followed were, in part, consequences of colonial hierarchies. That’s not to say that such divisions didn’t exist before, but they were exacerbated by colonial powers such as Belgium. You

PROFILE

Paula Akpan is a journalist, historian and public speaker whose work focuses on blackness, queerness, social politics and our relationship with technology

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAMIAN MCFADDEN

can trace hatred and violence – between Hutu and Tutsi, for example – back to colonisation and to what many rulers in the book were trying to resist through confrontation, diplomacy or strategic retreat.

Returning to the women themselves, as I mentioned earlier, many of these rulers have been forgotten or marginalised. Consider the Dahomey woman warriors: an all-woman force who fought seasoned armies. In recent years, they've gained renewed attention through films such as *Black Panther* (2018) and *The Woman King* (2022). Yet many historical documents are ambiguous about whether Queen Hangbé, who founded the Agoodojǐè regiment, even existed.

When I visited the Royal Palaces of Abomey in Benin and spoke to local historians, though, there was no doubt. Hangbé was erased from official history because she was a woman, and her reign from 1708 to 1711 was omitted for that reason. Had I relied solely on colonial sources, I'd have found scholars debating whether she was mythical. But I met the current reigning Queen Tassi Hangbé, a direct descendant who still represents her lineage. The gap between what is accepted in the west and what is known locally is striking.

As a member of the African diaspora, I cannot speak for continental Africans, nor would I presume to. But from what I've been told, there are deep silences around these histories. One Rwandan interviewee told me she struggled to find information about a pivotal woman ruler in her country. She also shared that the word 'feminist' doesn't exist in her community as it does in the west. To identify as such is to be seen as 'uppity' or a man-hater, and she doesn't feel safe using the term. For her and for others, it may be empowering to see stories of erased or overlooked women brought into focus. This book is an attempt to critically engage with historical sources while contributing to the growing canon around these rulers.

You state that your book is fundamentally about power. Can you elaborate on that point?

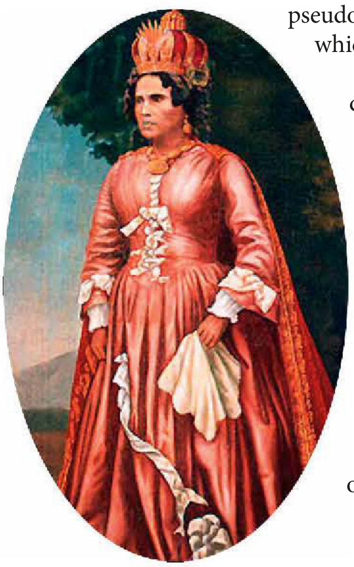
The power that African rulers wielded is often overlooked, and understandings of both pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa are frequently reductive. Within these narratives, there's often insufficient analysis of how African elites treated other Africans – particularly the lower classes and those they enslaved. This lack of scrutiny is troubling.

I understand the desire to highlight wealth and heroism, especially because so much of African history focuses on suffering – colonisation, displacement and occupation. It makes sense that Africans, both on the continent and in the diaspora, seek to counterbalance that pain with stories of greatness. For example, Mansa Musa, 14th-century ruler of the Mali empire, is frequently cited as one of the wealthiest individuals in history. Emphasising such figures helps assert that Africans were also rulers, also kings. However, this focus can obscure the reality that many African rulers also caused harm. Like rulers elsewhere, they were often self-interested, consolidating power at the expense of others.

When considering women and genderqueer figures, the narrative becomes even narrower. Women are often portrayed as selfless mothers, nurturers, life-givers – idealised in educational materials for children. But we must also confront the violence they oversaw. Under rulers including Ranavalona, Məntəwwab of Ethiopia and others I examine in this book, violent structures were expanded. That, too, is part of African history.

We shouldn't shy away from these truths. To understand these figures fully, we must take in the whole picture. Rather than turning them into paragons, we should look at their actions and how they presented themselves, and engage with them honestly.

> **"Women are often portrayed as selfless mothers, nurturers, life-givers – idealised in educational materials. But we must also confront the violence they oversaw"**



Lurid tales

Western audiences were captivated by descriptions of Ranavalona I, sovereign of the Kingdom of Madagascar, cutting her enemies in half with enormous scissors

Africa is vast, diverse and complex. Have certain regions dominated historical narratives over others?

Some regions are clearly dominant in popular narratives. Ghana – the former Gold Coast and Asante territories – features heavily. Many of my Ghanaian friends appreciated that I included Nana Yaa Asantewaa. Similarly, figures such as Shaka Zulu from South Africa are often highlighted. I believe this is partly shaped by our world view. The Gold Coast and much of South Africa were occupied by the British, who imposed English across these regions. This colonial lens has influenced which African regions are viewed as most prominent – often those where English was imposed.

There's also significant emphasis on the pyramids and ancient Egyptian history. Over time, this positioned Egypt as the pinnacle of African civilisation, or at least its primary representative. Early explorers and anthropologists didn't see similar structures elsewhere on the continent, reinforcing this perception.

Colourism plays a role, too. Physical features and skin tone influenced how palatable certain groups were to colonisers. In Rwanda and Burundi, for example, the Belgians favoured the Tutsis, describing them as having 'Ethiopianoid' features such as long fingers, narrow noses and a tall stature. The Hutus, by contrast, were perceived as shorter and broader. These arbitrary distinctions fed racist ideas about who was 'fit to rule'. The Belgians reinforced a hierarchy that aligned physical features with intelligence, which was typical of pseudoscientific thinking of the time. This has influenced which African histories and leaders are spotlighted.

Colonial chroniclers also played a part. They dramatised accounts of figures including Shaka Zulu, filling them with gory details, and wrote fantastical tales about rulers such as Ranavalona, who was said to have tried to build enormous scissors to cut enemies in half. There was a thirst for sensational stories about distant, 'uncivilised' societies that captivated western audiences.

At the core of this issue is the question: what do people imagine that precolonial African societies looked like? That's perhaps where the conversation should begin. What do historians think that these peoples were doing before colonisation, or during the occupation by Europeans?

Colonisers often painted Africa as empty or undeveloped. They claimed that the land wasn't being used, that its people weren't harnessing resources, and that colonial intervention was necessary to bring civilisation, introducing concepts such as tenancy, property rights and the nuclear family. Missionaries often arrived with wives and children as models for what they believed African people should aspire to.

AKG-IMAGES

Once were warriors Women warriors of Dahomey (now part of Benin), pictured at the turn of the 20th century. During the 18th and 19th centuries, these troops – dubbed 'Amazons' by Europeans – faced seasoned armies

ALAMY

Powerful women Hear more from Paula Akpan on a forthcoming episode of our podcast: *historyextra.com/podcast*

Something you also ponder in the book is the 'what if' aspect of Africa's history, engaging with a concept called 'critical fabulation'. What is that?

Critical fabulation originates from the work of Saidiya Hartman, a distinguished scholar who doesn't strictly describe herself as a historian. Her work bridges history and narrative, examining source materials, often archival, and challenging them to imagine alternative possibilities. This isn't about inventing freely, but a radical act of interpretation.

Think about the fact that many African enslaved people were documented merely as cargo, listed alongside gold or mahogany yet considered of lesser value. The presence of enslaved Africans is often traceable only faintly through ship logs or fragments, highlighting their systematic erasure.

Critical fabulation begins with the premise that the archive itself is a site of violence. This approach acknowledges that archivists and historians bring their own biases to the material they curate. It offers counter-histories produced using the same or similar sources – not necessarily to 'humanise' or 'give voice', but to challenge what is already accepted as fact, what is already deemed unquestionable.

In my introduction, I reference the *Cape Coast* incident of 1721 [in which enslaved Africans overpowered the crew on a slave ship en route to the Americas]. Colonial officials chose to present a version of those events that would be more palatable to their audience, because the idea that 17 enslaved African men and boys could escape and overpower seven white men was inconceivable – it disrupted the assumed order of their society.

Recognising that colonial sources often serve specific agendas, critical fabulation and the pursuit of counter-histories confront the violence in these records and offer both alternatives and correctives.

If you could have a conversation with one of these historical figures, who would it be, and why?

I think I'd really like to speak to Ranavalona I. I'm fascinated by her as a ruler of Imerina who was so determined to preserve her island and its way of life against French and British colonisers that she was willing to purge any trace of foreign influence, including Christianity.

That kind of single-mindedness – ultimately to her own detriment – is something I struggle to fully comprehend. And yet, despite her fierce commitment to self-sufficiency and resistance, Madagascar was colonised anyway. I'd be curious to know how she would perceive her legacy today.

When I visited Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, I spoke to local Malagasy people about Ranavalona. Many either disliked her, were indifferent to her or hadn't heard of her. Some genuinely hated what she represented. One interviewee described her as a feminist. I'm not sure I'd use that term myself, but I understand the sentiment, seeing her as a powerful woman figure.

But that's where things gets complicated with woman African rulers. Being a woman – and an African woman – doesn't automatically make someone a positive figure. We also have to acknowledge the harm some of them caused. At the same time, many Africans have been starved of historical figures from their own lands that they can look up to. In the ongoing context of colonisation and neo-colonialism, someone like Ranavalona, who stood firm, can be a galvanising symbol, especially as a woman. It's complex.

I'd be deeply curious to know if she had any regrets. Would she have done things differently, knowing that Madagascar would be colonised regardless? Would she still have gone to such extremes, knowing that her son would quickly undo all she built after her death? How would that have affected her? She'd definitely be high on my list.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions about African leadership, especially by women, that you aim to challenge in your book?

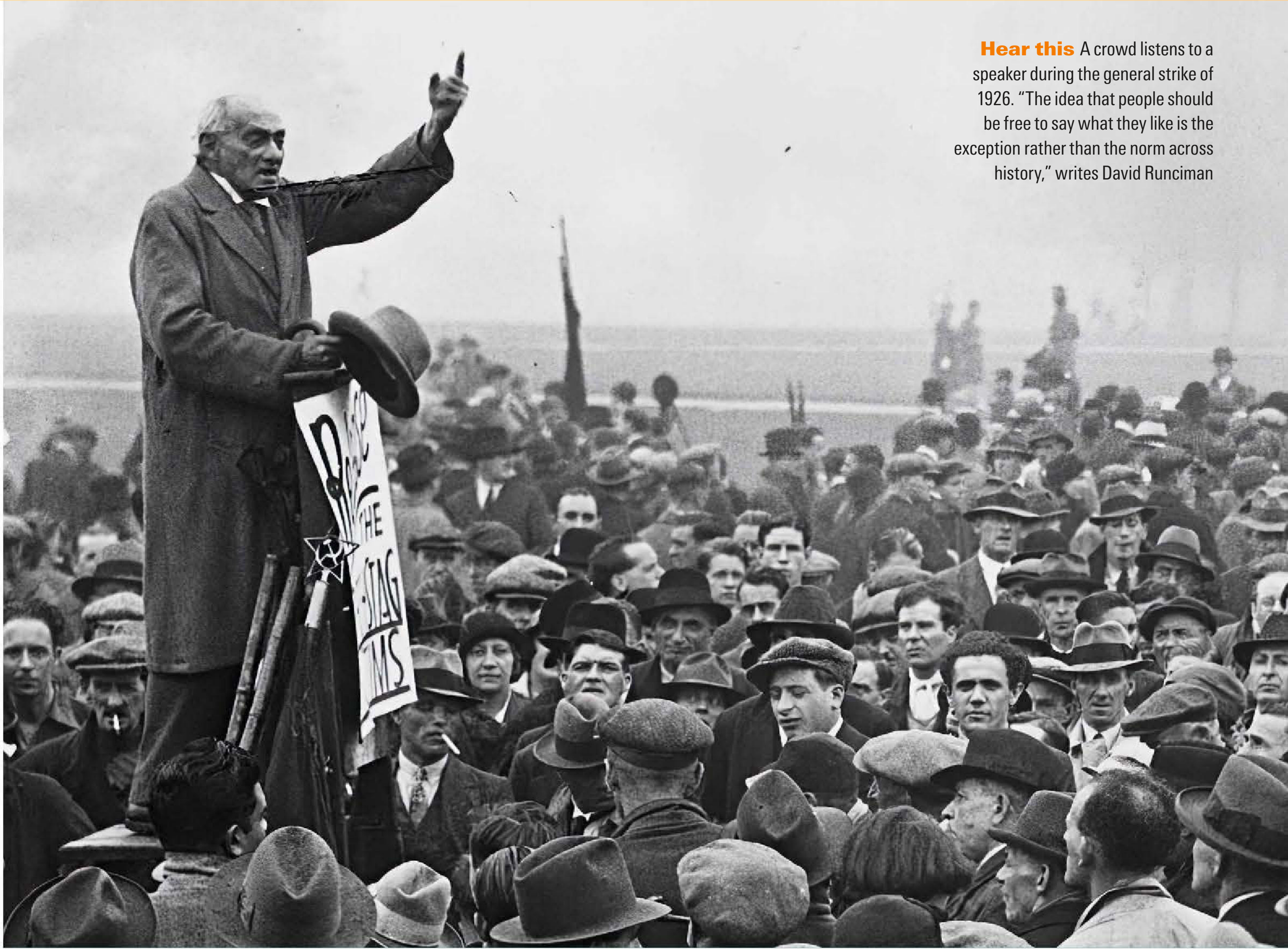
I didn't undertake the project with a deliberate approach, but being a black African lesbian woman brings a particular lens to how I engage with history. For example, I was especially interested in exploring Njinga's gender, the sexualities of the Agoodojìè and how they engaged with women in the palace – be they sex workers, companions, or each other.

This perspective allows me to highlight aspects that might be overlooked by other historians. Many scholars have dismissed the possibility that the Agoodojìè engaged sexually with one another, which reflects a broader resistance to recognising queerness in historical narratives.

That connects to how I read Njinga, and my aim to honour the plurality of their identity. It wasn't about setting out to challenge the dominant narrative; I naturally gravitate towards certain critical approaches, and that inevitably shapes my work.

A key part of the book involved examining colonial scholars who are often quoted uncritically. Too often, we fail to interrogate the vested interests behind colonial source material. I found that many of these commentators – those critical of figures including Ranavalona and other African rulers – often held colonial administrative positions in places such as Senegal or Madagascar. Their perspectives weren't neutral; they were shaped by colonial power and bias.

All of this ties in with the lens through which I view history. Every historian brings subjectivity to their work, whether they admit it or not. The idea of objectivity is a myth. Embracing that subjectivity has allowed me to sharpen my critiques and deepen my research. ■



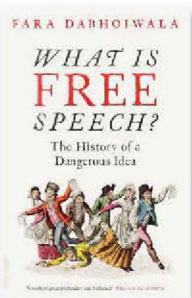
Hear this A crowd listens to a speaker during the general strike of 1926. “The idea that people should be free to say what they like is the exception rather than the norm across history,” writes David Runciman

ALAMY

IDEAS

Who says what and why they say it

DAVID RUNCIMAN is impressed by an exploration of how arguments over free speech are often rooted in a desire to close down dialogue



What Is Free Speech? The History of a Dangerous Idea
by Fara Dabhoiwala
Allen Lane, 480 pages, £30

On 27 February, the day before he lectured the Ukrainian president in the Oval Office on the virtues of gratitude, the US vice president, JD Vance, lectured the British prime minister in the same place on the virtues of free speech. Sitting with President Trump, Vance told Keir Starmer that he and his boss were concerned about British censorship of free expression, especially online. “We know that there have been infringements on free speech that actually affect not just the British,” he complained to his visitor, “but also affect technology companies and, by extension, American citizens.” Starmer was not to be cowed. He responded that he had nothing to apologise for. “In relation to free speech in the UK,” he said, “I’m very proud of our history there.”

In fact, it could be argued that both men were being profoundly disingenuous, as is so often the case when high principles of free speech are invoked. Fara Dabhoiwala’s excellent, revisionist history *What Is Free Speech?* makes clear that free speech absolutists such as Vance are invariably anything but. Dig a little deeper and their uncompromising stance is hedged around with caveats. Usually what they mean is that they believe in free speech for the people they think merit it. Meanwhile, no British leader should get on his high horse about British traditions of liberty of expression. That proud history of which Starmer boasted is deeply compromised by episodes of corruption and repression.

Dabhoiwala’s theme is that free speech is a highly artificial construct. The idea that people should be free to say what they like regardless of the costs is the exception rather than the norm across history. It is only

> The idea people should be free to say what they like regardless of the costs is the exception rather than the norm across history

relatively recently that anyone has thought to believe that speech stands outside the balance of benefits and harms that we apply to other kinds of actions. Indeed, the idea that speech is not in itself an action but simply a means of expression would have struck most human societies as eccentric. Words, just as much as sticks and stones, have the power to break people. Champions of free speech like to insist that what matters is simply the content of what is said, which should not be curtailed. Dabhoiwala argues that what often matters more is context: we need to know who is speaking and to understand what other kinds of power they might be exercising.

These themes are well illustrated in the foundational event in the Anglophone story: the publication in London between 1720 and 1723 of *Cato's Letters*, a series of anonymous newspaper articles that made a serious case for the first time that free speech – and in particular "liberty of the press" – was a basic political right. *Cato's Letters* have gone on to acquire totemic status for free speech absolutists, particularly in the United States, where they were regularly quoted in the run-up to the American Revolution and have been invoked ever since. But as Dabhoiwala shows, these supposedly principled arguments were also pieces of hackwork.

Their authors – two men on the make called Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard – were in the pay of Whig politicians and writing to abuse Tory and Jacobite opponents. When Tory pamphleteers took the opportunity offered by enhanced press freedom to return the favour, they changed their tune. 'Cato' announced, as he was paid to do, that free speech was far too dangerous if Jacobites were going to take advantage of it.

Nothing is straightforward

Dabhoiwala does his best to write a global history of what follows. He has a fascinating chapter on India and the contortions of the British Raj in trying to uphold liberal principles while preventing the natives from saying anything that might undermine British rule. He shows that another iconic juncture in the history of free speech – JS Mill's argument in *On Liberty* (1859) that individual freedom of expression in the face of social conformity trumps everything else – also belongs to the context of empire. Mill believed individuals should be free to make their own mistakes but only if they were capable of learning from them. He did not believe that applied to Britain's non-white imperial subjects. This was absolute freedom of expression for white men and a few white women.

Nonetheless, the focus of the story is somewhat inevitably on the USA. There are two reasons for this. The First Amendment to the American Constitution has become a touchstone for arguments about freedom of expression among those who want to defend it in uncompromising terms. At the same time, the vast global influence of the big US technology companies has become the battleground for the free speech culture wars. These two factors come together in the notion of 'the marketplace of ideas', which emerged in the 20th century as the benchmark of free expression in American jurisprudence.

The ironies in that history abound. The marketplace of ideas was first articulated as a defence of the rights of communists and other radicals to promote their views, which usually included a searing critique of the American media landscape and its subjection to the wealth and whims of a few press barons. Meanwhile, some of the tech giants have taken advantage of the supposed sanctity of free speech to shirk their responsibilities for what's published on their platforms in markets where many of them have effective monopolies. As a result, when they say anything goes, it is almost impossible to push back. When it comes to free speech, money still talks louder than anything.

Dabhoiwala concludes with some remarks on where arguments about free speech might be heading. These are fairly equivocal, which is unsurprising given that his history of the concept has shown that nothing about free speech is straightforward. He does not have much to say about 'cancel culture' or the battles being fought on university campuses, beyond asking for more sensitivity to context. But in truth the real lesson of this book is that fights about free speech are almost always proxies for something else. The best response to someone who invokes free speech as an absolute principle is to ask, as Starmer might have asked Vance but didn't: "What are you *really* talking about?"

David Runciman is the host of *Past Present Future: The History of Ideas* podcast. His most recent book is *The History of Ideas* (Profile, 2024)

FROM FACT TO FICTION

She's the boss

Emily Maguire discusses *Rapture,* her novel about the legend of a female pope

What first intrigued you about the Pope Joan legend?

On the surface, the story is of a trickster and adventurer, someone hoodwinking her supposed superiors. That was enough to hook me. As I dug deeper, I found the legend is concerned with things I've written about for 20 years: identity, ambition, faith, patriarchy, sex.

How much of your protagonist's journey is rooted in real history?

I drew from several medieval versions of the legend to plot her journey. As per the 13th-century chronicler Martin of Poland, my Agnes is born in Mainz of English heritage in the early ninth century. Then, as a young woman, she goes on a journey with a lover while disguised as a man. Other chroniclers provided different details and I took from them when it suited the story. However, not a single one of these details is verifiable.

Did you treat the Pope Joan legend as fact, fiction or something in-between?

I wrote from a position of, okay, let's say this really happened, what kind of woman could have pulled it all off? What might have been driving her? What obstacles would be in her way? Why would she take the incredible risks that she took? It was never an attempt to prove or disprove the legend.

What real historical details shaped the world of *Rapture*?

Two key settings were particularly fun to build up from the historical records: the monastery in Fulda and the Lateran Palace in Rome. There are also some real historical conflicts raging in the background as Agnes works her way across Europe and up the church's ladder, most notably the Carolingian civil war fought between Charlemagne's grandsons and the revival of iconoclasm in the eastern church.

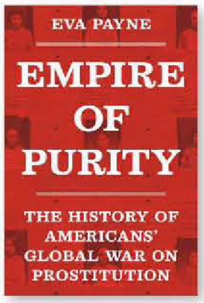
SARAH WILSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Rapture
by Emily Maguire
Sceptre, 320 pages, £16.99

SEX

A doctrine of self-control

FERN RIDDELL gives a cautious welcome to an exploration of American attitudes down the years towards both sex work and female sex workers



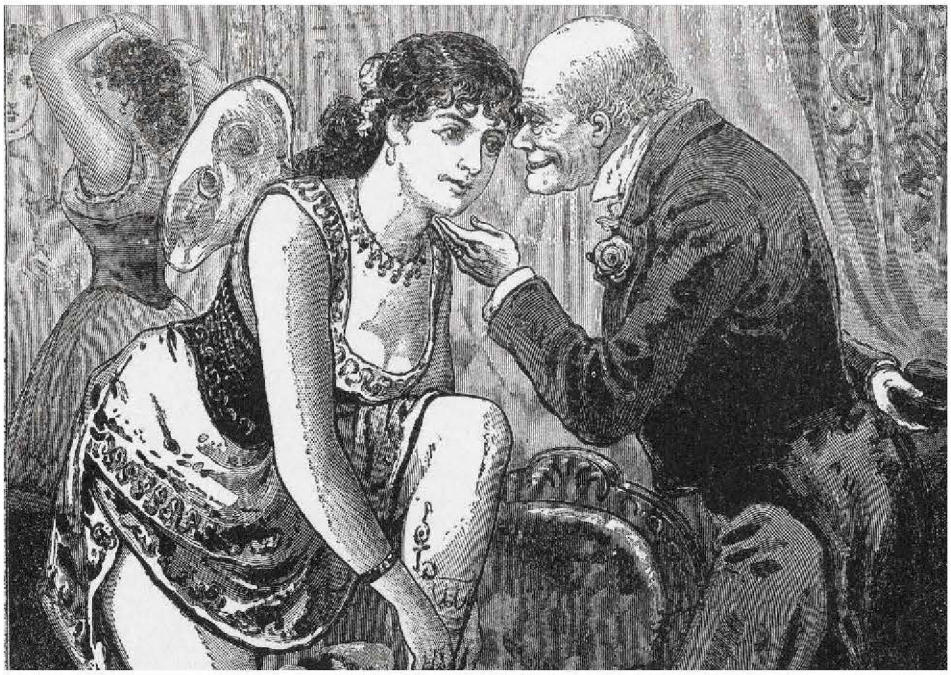
Empire of Purity: The History of Americans' Global War on Prostitution
by Eva Payne
Princeton University Press, 336 pages, £30

In this study of America's crusade against female prostitution, both at home and abroad, Eva Payne lays out the emotional and moral conflicts that surround sex work. While *Empire of Purity* is not a book for the casual reader, Payne's dense academic research is interspersed with fascinating glimpses of individuals caught up in the quest to regulate and criminalise American sex workers, from 1870 to the 1930s.

According to Payne, as America grappled with its moral consciousness and attempted to define the New World, the notion of 'Sexual Exceptionalism' emerged. This was the idea that the American character was built on sexual self-control, free of the vices of Europe. Against this backdrop, women, especially sex workers, found themselves caught up in a global battle between the rights of the individual and the power of government.

It is shocking to learn that in some states the age of consent was just nine years old. And Payne works hard to present the horrors and abuses that were experienced by women of colour and other immigrants in America and in American colonies.

Nevertheless, one of the most powerful arguments in Payne's work is her indisputable evidence that the voices of sex workers themselves were consistently ignored by public policymakers. Officials, preoccupied with controlling unruly women, in turn demonised them, then taxed and finally criminalised those who refuse to be ruled. While not shy about the reality of sex trafficking, or the abuses found within prostitution, Payne makes clear the immense historical evidence showing how those in the sex industry do not fit one specific 'victim' label.



A price to pay From c1880, a line drawing commissioned for the *Police Gazette* – a forerunner of men's lifestyle magazines – shows a young sex worker in the company of a hunched and lecherous older man

> **"When American feminists stood at the crossroads of political enfranchisement, they demonised sex workers"**

Empire of Purity also contains a harsh truth. Just as in Britain, as the early feminist movements began to engage with the concept of sex work, middle-class white women became preoccupied with their own safety, viewing sex workers as a danger to family and the home. They enmeshed the campaign for female suffrage with the idea of a woman's purity and her sexual self-control. Sex workers who advocated for their own personal freedoms and their right to the lives they had chosen directly challenged this idea. Just as in the Old World, when American feminists stood at the crossroads of political enfranchisement, they demonised those women who needed the protection of the law the most.

To find a flaw with Payne's work, it lies in her desire to present America's history as unique. Exploring American attempts to enforce its new morality on Europe, Payne fails to acknowledge seriously that Americans were often only following the methods and arguments that had already been circulating in Europe for 50 years. Europe's long history of feminist sex educators, such as Annie Besant and Kitty Marion, also does not feature. This is a shame, as Payne devotes significant time to a detailed rebuttal of the portrayal of sex workers as disease vectors – a common theme both before and after the First World War. Touching on the importance of widely used contraceptive measures, advocated for by women and advertised on the front pages of British newspapers from the 1890s onwards, would have added to her informative work.

This is a book for those interested in a detailed, complex history, which sets out to challenge myths and misconceptions.

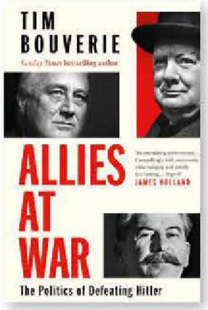
Fern Riddell is a cultural historian. Her new book, *Victoria's Secret: The Private Passion of a Queen* (Ebury), is published in July

TOPFOTO

WWII

Diplomatic mission

RICHARD TOYE salutes an exploration of the relationship between the 'Big Three' Allied leaders



Allies at War: The Politics of Defeating Hitler
by Tim Bouverie
Bodley Head, 688 pages, £25

"Roosevelt was suspicious of Churchill and Stalin was suspicious of everybody," recalled British general Sir Leslie Hollis, "But outwardly they were all the greatest of buddies." An obvious interpretation of this comment, quoted in Tim Bouverie's highly readable account of Second World War politics, is that the 'Big Three' – Franklin D Roosevelt, Josef Stalin and Winston Churchill – played out their ruthless pursuit of national interests under a cynical cloak of personal friendliness.

Without denying the power plays clearly involved here, there is also a more optimistic reading – that, in spite of clashes, frictions and occasional stand-up rows, the leaders of the USSR, the US and the UK all understood how to behave diplomatically, even if they didn't always do so in practice.

Bouverie's focus on diplomatic history is to be applauded, as is his achievement in creating a fast-paced narrative that offers firm judgments yet gives readers leeway to draw their own conclusions. He also references a highly impressive range of archival sources, albeit dominated by British collections.

His analysis is not revisionist in any dramatic sense. Rather, he seeks to expand the reader's understanding of incidents such as the Royal Navy's destruction of France's fleet in July 1940 – an episode that caused deep resentments in France, but which is largely forgotten or uncontroversial in the UK. There is also welcome coverage of the differing varieties of Irish and Spanish neutrality, and of western relations with Chinese nationalist allies.

Bouverie's title is drawn from one of Churchill's adages: "There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies and that is fighting without them." The paradoxical double meaning in that phrase summons the suggestion that the notional partners were, in fact, at daggers drawn, and there is plenty of red meat in the book that lends support to that idea.

Exhibit A might be the 1943 Tehran Conference, at which Roosevelt cruelly ganged up with Stalin, teasing Churchill "about John Bull, about his cigars and about his habits". The president recalled in his own account that: "I kept it up until Stalin was laughing with me and it was then that I called him 'Uncle Joe'… From that time on our relations were personal… and we talked like men and brothers." This was a tactical humiliation of the leader of a declining power in pursuit of a strategic goal – long-term US-Soviet cooperation – that would prove illusory. There are plenty more examples that support the narrative of the Grand Alliance as a dog-eat-dog scenario.

But perhaps the most difficult task in assessing the evidence is how to weight it. Friction produces visible sparks: conflicts and disputes generate the biggest paper trails, and these provide material for the dramatic tales that historians like to tell. Conversely, successful cooperation generates fewer records because, unlike crises, it doesn't always seem necessary to explain how this occurred. Fortunately, Bouverie does not overdo the doom and gloom. He acknowledges, for example, that, "The Anglo-American alliance was the most formidable, intricate and, in many ways, harmonious military alliance in history." The lesson for today's world leaders might be that they should work a little harder at pretending to be friends. H

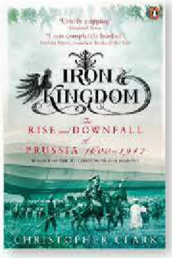
Richard Toye is professor of history at the University of Exeter. His books include *Winston Churchill: A Life in the News* (Oxford University Press, 2020)

Winston Churchill, Franklin D Roosevelt and Josef Stalin, pictured at the Yalta Conference, 1945

ALAMY

THE CLASSIC BOOK

Katja Hoyer recalls how **Iron Kingdom** showed her a new way to write history



Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947
by Christopher Clark
(Allen Lane, 2006)

In 2007, I was a somewhat disorientated history student at the University of Jena in central Germany. Raised in small-town eastern Germany, I was in awe of the academics who were showing me how to do real history.

Rising stars such as Professor Jörn Leonhard were telling me I showed promise as a historian. I seemed to have found my calling. But there was a problem: I couldn't see what it was all for. Academic history seemed rather exclusive. Did I really want to dedicate my life to the study of a subject I'd only ever discuss with a handful of like-minded experts?

Then a book appeared that changed everything: Christopher Clark's *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600–1947*. Beautifully written and academically brilliant, it did something amazing: it got Germans talking, about their history and about themselves. One reviewer explained why: intellectually, Clark was on a par with the great German historians but his writing was "surprisingly empathetic".

Devouring *Iron Kingdom* cover to cover, I understood something that was to define my own ambitions: it was possible to write history with a pinch of human empathy.

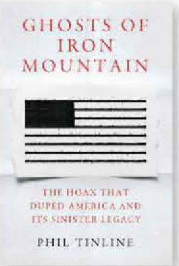
In 2023, I sat on a stage in London launching my book *Beyond the Wall: East Germany 1949–1990* – with Christopher Clark. His work inspired my journey there, and I believe *Iron Kingdom* still has the power to show young historians how impactful and humane our discipline can be. H

Katja Hoyer is a historian and journalist. Her *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949–1990* was published by Allen Lane in 2023

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

The feel of truth

JOSEPH E USCINSKI enjoys an account of a fake report that supposedly exposed a huge conspiracy to wage war in support of the American economy



Ghosts of Iron Mountain: The Hoax that Duped America and its Sinister Legacy
by Phil Tinline
Apollo, 336 pages, £25

People often think that their beliefs are determined by reality – that they believe things because those things are, in fact, true. Having polled the American public for the past decade about their beliefs, particularly those relating to conspiracy theories, I would argue that the truth sometimes plays little role in determining what people believe. This seems to be especially the case when it comes to political belief.

Too often, people prefer to believe comfortable ideas that do not force them to question their pre-existing beliefs. As such, sometimes people adopt beliefs that are true and sometimes they adopt beliefs that are false. This is not a new phenomenon, but it is a major reason why people disagree about 'truth': they might not be as motivated to find what *is* true as they are to find what *feels* true.

Most of us would, of course, like to think that our beliefs stem from an examination of the available evidence; it makes those beliefs seem justified. But often that evidence is sought *after* beliefs are formed, leaving people to cherry-pick, after the fact, justifications and rationalisations for beliefs that could be as wrong as they are right. Worse still, even in the absence of evidence, beliefs are often the product of mere 'feels'. A person might acknowledge that their cherished idea has little evidence to back it up, but claim that their idea is true regardless, because *it sure feels that way.*

Enter Phil Tinline's new book, in which he masterfully tells the story of a purposeful hoax intended to satirise America's Vietnam-era war machine. A report was published supposedly detailing a government study group's conclusion that the US requires endless wars both to fuel its economy and provide political stability. The fictitious *Report from Iron Mountain* (1967) concluded, without any apparent irony, that peace would be bad for the USA.

The hoax convinced numerous people who, even after it was exposed, continued to rely on it to buttress their beliefs about US war policy. This episode in American history is not unique – there have been numerous others like it – and it would be hard to claim that it changed public opinion meaningfully or sparked a new era of conspiracy theorising. The hoax simply *felt* true to people who already viewed world events as more contrived than happenstance.

"The fictitious 1967 report concluded, without any apparent irony, that peace would be bad for the United States"

Too many authors have attempted to pinpoint a singular cause of today's distrust and conspiracy theorising. Tinline avoids such grand claims by attempting to fit a fascinating story into a timeline already replete with episodes of distrust and disdain. That said, it is not hard to see this hoax's influence throughout American culture, whether in the 1980s comedy film *Spies Like Us* or in the post-9/11 television series *Jericho*, both of which centre on nuclear attacks recommended by a think tank. Tinline also avoids the trap of applying a partisan lens to the hoax. Instead, he shows that extreme distrust of the military-industrial complex is an equal opportunity game.

Joseph E Uscinski is a professor of political science at the University of Miami. His books include *Conspiracy Theories and the People Who Believe Them* (Oxford University Press, 2018)

Primed for action Marines serving in Vietnam in 1967, the same year a hoax report convinced some Americans that a government study group thought the country needed to fight endless wars

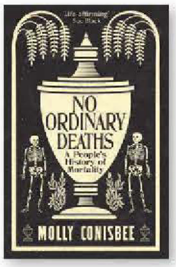
GETTY IMAGES

Royal respect Queen Victoria and four of her daughters are photographed in mourning dress around a bust of Prince Albert in 1862, the year after the royal consort's death

ALAMY

CULTURAL

Dark matter



No Ordinary Deaths: A People's History of Mortality

by Molly Conisbee

Wellcome Collection, 368 pages, £22

In this light-touch overview of popular British cultural life, which is clearly a labour of love, Molly Conisbee mixes focused narratives of individual lives with more general accounts of mortality. In doing so, she surveys England's pre- and post-Reformation religious customs, the rise of funeral directors in the 19th century, and some of today's ideas of a good death.

Frequent diversions lead into fascinating byways, including subjects such as industrialisation, Victorian families, social class, even shopping for mourning dress in the new department stores. A single page can easily encompass Norwegian artist Edvard Munch's works alongside the books of popular Christian writer CS Lewis (best known for his Narnia novels for children), showing how their personal grief influenced their work. Occasional photographic illustrations help to set scenes.

Chapters cover ideas of body, soul and afterlife, as well as mourning customs in England, Wales and Ireland. The author covers in detail the dreadful 1832 law that allowed for the destitute to be taken straight from the poor house to medical dissection theatres.

Many forms of memorials and obituaries are cited, including those of same-sex relationships, as are legal details of coroners and their work.

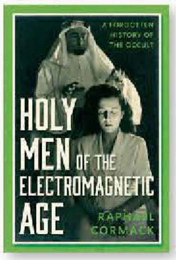
Whether discussing public executions and dismemberment or the private watching-over of a household's dead, Conisbee is committed to the lived experience of those who seldom make it into history books.

This eclectic book follows its own flow of thought, drawing from well known historical studies, new research and an appreciation of folklore, as well as personal experience and comments from friends. Perhaps Conisbee's epilogue dwells too much on "our modern, individualistic relationship to our mortality"; we may well not be quite so individualistic within our welfare state as this proposes. H

Douglas Davies, professor in the Department of Theology and Religion, and director in the Centre for Death and Life Studies at Durham University

CULTURAL

Mystical figures


A FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF THE OCCULT
HOLY MEN OF THE ELECTROMAGNETIC AGE
RAPHAEL CORMACK

Holy Men of the Electromagnetic Age: A Forgotten History of the Occult

by Raphael Cormack

Hurst, 304 pages, £25

In late 1924, *Reynolds's Illustrated News* ran a piece on modern spiritualism by Arthur Conan Doyle. Already known as an outspoken proponent of spiritualism, Doyle aligned the manifestations of the seance room with biblical marvels, and proclaimed that the New Testament contained no miracle he had not himself seen in the modern day, either "as described or in some analogous form". These wonders, Doyle argued, indicated unseen powers and the promise of new ways of understanding the world.

The promise of new truths underpins the celebrity of the 'Holy Men' considered here by Raphael Cormack. Much has been written about Doyle and his belief in (mainly) Anglo-American mediums and mystics, but there are fewer studies on the rise of the modern occult in the Middle East. Cormack goes some way towards addressing this gap, offering a cultural history of the appeal of the apparently marvellous in times of political, social and cultural upheaval.

The book is centred on the careers of two rarely discussed figures: Tahra Bey, a self-styled fakir who took Paris by storm in 1925; and Dr Dahesh, founder of a pan-religious doctrine brought into the public eye by the working of purported miracles that drew on a blend of hypnotism, spiritualism and other occult practices.

The narrative is grounded in archival research. European and Arabic sources are used to reconstruct interwar lives and present a tale of transnational careers.

As with any such investigation, there are gaps in the records. These are openly acknowledged, and the book does not shy away from offering accounts of events for which there is no corroborating evidence. This might, in other historical studies, weaken the narrative: here, the opposite is true. In documenting hearsay as well as fact, the book strengthens the reader's appreciation of the role played by word of mouth in the construction of celebrity.

In resurrecting these mystical characters for the 21st-century reader, Cormack presents a fascinating study of the way mythical status can be conjured out of the human desire for meaning in times of darkness. H

Fiona Snailham, lecturer in English literature at the University of Greenwich

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY By **Jonathan Wright** and **Danny Bird**

HISTORY COOKBOOK **Victorian jelly**

HISTORIC CITIES **Buenos Aires**, Argentina

LONDON MUSEUM

① A medieval badge decorated with four phalluses. Phallic badges were popular in Europe; some people may have believed that they conferred protection on the wearer

② A gold ring from the mid-15th century, set with a pink 'spinel' stone and engraved with the inscription *pour amor, say douc*, meaning 'for love, so sweet'

③ A set of dentures made from carved ivory and human teeth affixed with gold and other metal pins, c1701–50

EXHIBITION

Mudbound marvels

Dig into thousands of years of London's hidden past through more than 350 weird and wonderful finds made by mudlarks along the foreshore of the Thames. Objects unearthed, including the three items shown here, range from Tudor hats to Viking daggers. A new exhibition at London Museum Docklands allows visitors to explore forgotten stories of the river, get hands-on with real discoveries, and watch live conservation in action.

Secrets of the Thames: Mudlarking London's Lost Treasures
London Museum Docklands / Until 1 March 2026 /
londonmuseum.org.uk

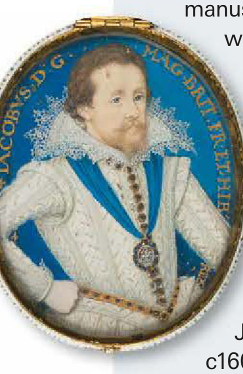
What's on this week?
Visit *historyextra.com* for updates on upcoming history TV and radio programmes

EXHIBITIONS

Austen and Turner: A Country House Encounter

Harewood House, Leeds / Until 19 October / *harewood.org*

See Regency Britain through the eyes of Jane Austen and JMW Turner this spring amid the Palladian splendour of Harewood House. Marking 250 years since the birth of both creators, this exhibition pairs Turner's luminous landscapes with Austen's sharp social commentary, exploring the role of the country house in art and society. Discover rare treasures including Austen's original *Sanditon* manuscript and early Turner watercolours – glimpses into the legacy of two cultural giants.


IACOBVS D G MAG BRIT FRA ET HIB

The World of King James VI & I

National Galleries of Scotland: Portrait, Edinburgh / Until 14 September / *nationalgalleries.org*

Step into the world of King James VI & I (pictured left, in a c1609 locket portrait) to admire royal portraits, jewels and garments. This exhibition explores his legacy as a ruler, patron and unifier of the Scottish and English crowns. Immersive storytelling and stunning artefacts bring the Jacobean court to life, revealing how the monarch shaped politics, culture and identity across two nations.

Cartier

V&A South Kensington, London / Until 16 November / *vam.ac.uk*

Be dazzled by glittering tiaras, celebrity commissions and royal treasures at the latest V&A exhibition. The displays reveal a world of glamour, innovation and craftsmanship through more than 350 spectacular objects, ranging from Princess Grace of Monaco's engagement ring to pieces worn by Rihanna.

Visitors will discover the artistry behind Cartier's iconic designs, from the bold flair of the art deco era (exemplified by the scarab brooch created in 1925, below) to contemporary high jewellery. Sections dedicated to the Cartier workshops, and the raw materials with which they work, bring these spectacular pieces to life.

Novelist Agatha Christie in her thirties. Sir David Suchet traces her 1922 worldwide tour in a new series

TV

Investigating Agatha

In later life, Dame Agatha Christie came to be regarded as a rather fusty and severe figure. Yet in many respects this was a facade: a part she played to deflect attention and cope with the pressures of her vast global fame.

One way to glimpse the woman behind this persona is to look to the young Christie. This is what Sir David Suchet, famed for his performances as the novelist's Belgian detective, Hercule Poirot, does here in a five-part travelogue. His focus is 1922, when Christie – then a 31-year-old novelist with a growing reputation – embarked on a 10-month worldwide tour promoting the forthcoming British Empire Exhibition to be held in London. The series also has much to say about the legacy of empire.

Travels with Agatha Christie and Sir David Suchet

More 4 / Wednesday 21 May

Students stage a mass protest on the campus of Gallaudet University in Washington, DC in 1988 demanding a "Deaf President Now"

TV

Presidential campaign

In 1988, the board at Gallaudet University, an institution in Washington, DC dedicated to teaching the deaf and hard of hearing, appointed a hearing president, Elisabeth Zinser. By overlooking several qualified deaf candidates, they sparked large-scale protests by students.

Co-directed by deaf advocate Nyle DiMarco and Davis Guggenheim (*An Inconvenient Truth*, *Waiting for "Superman"*), *Deaf President Now!* recounts how a week of rallies, boycotts and protests resulted in Zinser – showing considerable grace under pressure – resigning and Gallaudet's dean, I King Jordan, becoming its first deaf president. The documentary also explores how the protests paved the way for the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Deaf President Now!

Apple TV+ / streaming from Friday 16 May

REPRODUCED COURTESY OF THE COLLECTION OF THE BUCHANAN SOCIETY/CARTIER/GETTY/JEFF BEATTY/ALAMY/BBC/72 FILMS/BALAZS GLODI/GETTY IMAGES

Football supporters flee roaring flames at Bradford's Valley Parade ground on 11 May 1985

TV

A tragedy remembered

On 11 May 1985, when Bradford City's supporters flocked to their home stadium, Valley Parade, to watch their football team take on Lincoln City in the season's final game, there was a carnival atmosphere. Bradford had enjoyed a fine season and would be promoted from the old Third Division as champions.

Yet by the end of a goalless first half, this would seem unimportant. In windy conditions, a fire, believed to have been started by a discarded cigarette or match, spread rapidly through the antiquated main stand. Fifty-six supporters died. Four decades on, some of those who were there, including many speaking for the first time, recall the tragedy and its aftermath.

Unforgotten: The Bradford City Fire
BBC iPlayer / streaming now

Emőke Zsigmond plays Jane Austen in a new documentary series using her own correspondence and books to explore her character

TV

Literary pursuits

Despite the enduring fame of Jane Austen, understanding her life and work can be surprisingly tricky. In great part, this is because her sister, Cassandra, burned so many of Jane's letters to her. Nonetheless, some correspondence does survive, and the novels themselves are revealing of their creator's character.

These sources provide the raw material for a three-part documentary charting how Austen, so adept at chronicling inner lives, revolutionised the novel. Among those offering their perspectives are writers, actors and filmmakers such as Helen Fielding, Kate Atkinson, Colm Tóibín, Greta Scacchi, Samuel West and Tamsin Greig, plus experts including Dr Paula Byrne and Dr Priya Atwal.

Jane Austen: Rise of a Genius
BBC Two / Monday 26 May

RADIO HIGHLIGHTS

The political battle

In July 1945, before the surrender of Japan, British voters went to the polls. The general election brought the Labour Party, led by Clement Attlee, into power with a landslide majority of 146 seats. In the 20-part series **Postwar** (BBC Radio 4, Monday 9 June), historian David Runciman looks back at a time when the electorate voted for a break with the past.

This Week in History (BBC Radio 4 & BBC Sounds, continuing from Wednesday 21 May) is a five-minute slot in which Radio 4 announcers spotlight a trio of stories from the same week in a year from the past.

Presented by satirist Heydon Prowse, **En-Gulfed** (BBC Radio 4, Monday 19 May) explores the relationship between the UK and the Gulf states. It begins with a history lesson that takes in the early British empire and the discovery of oil.

The PR stunt has a rich history – one explored by Mark Borkowski in **Archive on 4: Outrage Inc** (BBC Radio 4, Saturday 31 May). His focus, taking in causes as varied as Fathers 4 Justice and Just Stop Oil, is in great part direct action and civil disobedience. There's more protest in **Illuminated: Doctor Doolittle and the Exploding Trout** (BBC Radio 4, Sunday 18 May), which recalls what happened when a Hollywood production team destroyed a trout stream in Castle Combe, Wiltshire.

Lady Swindlers with Lucy Worsley (BBC Radio 4) returns in mid-May with stories including the 'Yorkshire Witch', an international art thief and a Victorian woman who spiked men's drinks (see our article on page 41). Meanwhile, in **The Invention of... Hungary** (BBC Radio 4, Monday 9 June) Misha Glenny explores how Viktor Orbán uses historical events to political ends.

Forthcoming episodes of **Witness History** include an episode on 'Lunch Atop a Skyscraper' (BBC World Service, Monday 19 May), the famous 1932 photograph showing construction workers, legs dangling, eating lunch while sitting on a steel beam high above New York City. Christine Roussel, archivist at the Rockefeller Center, tells Vicky Farncombe about her research into the story behind the image.

Pete, head gardener at Beatrix Potter's Hill Top, faces Mr McGregor comparisons on BBC Two

TV

Heritage mysteries

Does a painting hanging in a Dorset cottage show an image of a young TE Lawrence? Can an archaeologist working at the ruins of Corfe Castle make a final discovery before he retires? And will Pete, head gardener at Hill Top, Beatrix Potter's farmhouse in the Lake District, forever have to put up with being mistaken for Mr McGregor from *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*?

These are just some of the questions answered in the returning *Hidden Treasures*, the fly-on-the-wall series following those who work for and volunteer with the National Trust. Along the way, cameras capture scenes from stately homes, more modest country retreats and a 20th-century modernist masterpiece.

Hidden Treasures of the National Trust
BBC Two / Friday 16 May

GAMES / Battling through turmoil

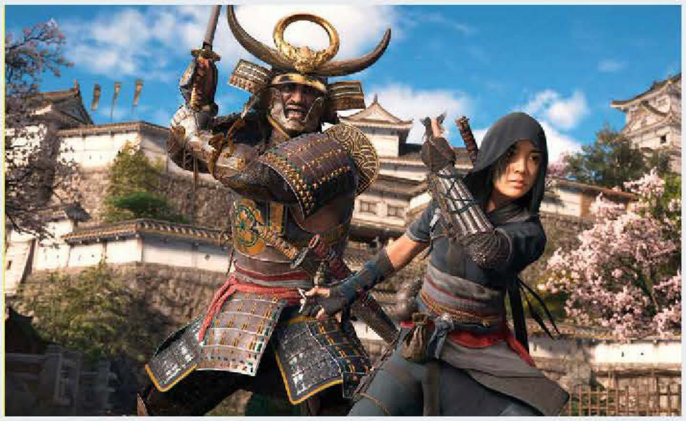
JAMES OSBORNE dives into a turbulent and transformative period of Japanese history on a mission involving a black samurai and a shady spy-warrior

ASSASSIN'S CREED
SHADOWS

Assassin's Creed Shadows
Ubisoft / £59.99

The closing chapter of Japan's Sengoku era – known as the 'warring states' period, nearly 150 years of civil war and fragmentation – came at the turn of the 17th century. This was a time of fragile alliances and rising warlords, when the foundations of modern Japan were laid through unification under ruthless feudal magnates such as Oda Nobunaga.

Assassin's Creed Shadows – the latest instalment in the long-running series – thrusts players into this transitional moment. Each player engages with this world by alternating between two protagonists: the *shinobi* Naoe and Yasuke, a black samurai.



Guide African samurai Yasuke and *shinobi* ('ninja') Naoe through the castles, mountains and farmland of 16th-century Japan in the latest *Assassin's Creed*

Shinobi, later mythologised as 'ninja', were warriors and spies, often from rural provinces such as Iga and Koka. Their expertise in espionage, sabotage and the use of guerrilla tactics became infamous. *Shadows* taps into that legacy, embedding Naoe's missions within the tradition of subterfuge and combat.

Yasuke, meanwhile, is a real figure from Japan's story: an African man, brought to the islands by Jesuit missionaries, who became the first known foreign-born samurai, briefly serving Oda Nobunaga in the late 16th century. His inclusion in the game brings to the fore a lesser-known strand of Japanese history, highlighting the country's brief period of openness to outside influence before the start of the *sakoku* (isolation) policy of the Tokugawa era.

Allowing players to engage with these dual perspectives provides two distinct avenues through which to explore the game's dramatic historical setting – and what follows is an experience shaped by place as much as by plot. As the game progresses, backdrops shift from imperial Kyoto to mountainous strongholds and rain-drenched farmland, all meticulously detailed.

In bringing these settings to life, *Assassin's Creed Shadows* depicts the turmoil and tumult of feudal Japan, and captures a defining moment in the country's journey.

James Osborne is digital content producer for *HistoryExtra*

BLAST BY THE SEA/UBISOFT

RECIPE

Victorian jelly

ELEANOR BARNETT explores the surprisingly long history of a quivering, colourful dessert popular with children

A fruit jelly served with plum compote and whipped cream. In the 1970s, savoury jellies were popular: the version (left) contains chicken

Wobbly and whimsical, jelly is known as a joyous, colourful sweet treat of children's birthday parties. In the 20th century, though, jelly wasn't just for kids – it was the height of fashion. There are today Instagram accounts dedicated to the jelly craze of the 1970s, when it was trendy to set everything – salads, fish, meat, eggs – in gelatine.

Some such dishes were surprisingly delicious, while others were entirely bizarre. Recently, I came across a recipe that called for a whole melon to be stuffed with fruit jelly, coated in cream cheese and salad dressing, and served on a bed of lettuce.

The history of jelly stretches back long before the 20th century. Medieval cooks were the first to write recipes incorporating aspic – a clear jelly made by slowly boiling down bones and meat, especially collagen-rich calves' feet, then straining the resulting liquid and allowing it to cool and set. Used to encase expensive meats, thereby preventing contact with air and keeping them fresh for longer, aspic was an effective preservation tool.

Beyond this practical use, jelly was celebrated as a fun and visually appealing dish. Jellies were prepared and served in a huge array of colours on the banquet tables of the wealthiest people in Renaissance Europe, moulded into elaborate shapes and flavoured with exotic spices.

This type of jelly made from meat scraps became a mainstay in the Victorian kitchen. Packaged gelatine, sold in leaf and powered forms, was introduced in the 19th century. This made it even easier for the busy housewife to make jelly, and led to an explosion in published recipes. One resulting success story was the business founded by Sir William Pickles Hartley. Having established his grocery shop in Lancashire, in 1871 he began selling jams, then marmalades and jellies. Still today, Hartley's is especially well known for its instant jelly cubes.

In part, the soaring popularity of jellies in the Victorian era was linked to the love of – and innovation in – moulds in that period. On the dining tables of the wealthy, wobbly jellies took on ornate shapes, sporting turrets, crosses, stars and flags, to the delight of party guests. By this time, too, more Britons had access to refrigeration in the form of ice boxes – cupboards kept cool using blocks of ice.

This month, we're making a simple fruit jelly, served with an optional (alcoholic) plum compote and whipped cream, based on Victorian recipes. This home-made version is refreshing and sophisticated, while still being visually and gustatorily fun – worlds away from the artificial jelly squares that you can buy in the shops now. Perhaps it's time for a new jelly craze! H

Serves: 6–8 (using a pint-sized jelly mould)
Difficulty: 3/10
Time taken: 1 hour

INGREDIENTS

For the jelly
900g apples (about 8)
Water
170g caster sugar
2 lemons
5 gelatine leaves

For the plum compote
230g plums (around 4)
350ml red wine
60g sugar
Peel of 1 lemon
1 stick of cinnamon

For the whipped cream
400ml whipping or double cream
40g icing sugar

METHOD

1. To make the compote, cut the plums in half and remove the stones. Stew on the hob with sugar, wine, lemon peel and cinnamon for 15 minutes or until the plums can be mushed and the mixture has reduced to a thick consistency. Remove the lemon and cinnamon, and leave to cool.
2. Whip the cream with the sugar using a hand or electric whisk.
3. Peel and cut the apples; add to a saucepan with sugar, water, the juice of two lemons and thinly sliced peel.
4. Cook on a high heat; once the sugar has melted, reduce to a low heat and simmer for 10 minutes or until the apple is soft.
5. Meanwhile, soak the gelatine leaves in cold water for 5 minutes.
6. Strain the fruit mixture and mush the apples to extract the juice (discarding pulp), then strain again. Top up with cold water to produce 570ml of fruit liquid.
7. Return to the saucepan and add in the gelatine sheets; cook on a low heat until they're dissolved.
8. Pour the liquid into the mould. Once cool, set in the fridge overnight.
9. Serve with plum compote and whipped cream placed around the jelly.

Eleanor Barnett is a food historian at Cardiff University and @Historyeats on Instagram. Her book *Leftovers: A History of Food Waste and Preservation* (Apollo) is out now

SHUTTERSTOCK/ELEANOR BARNETT

Buenos Aires in five places

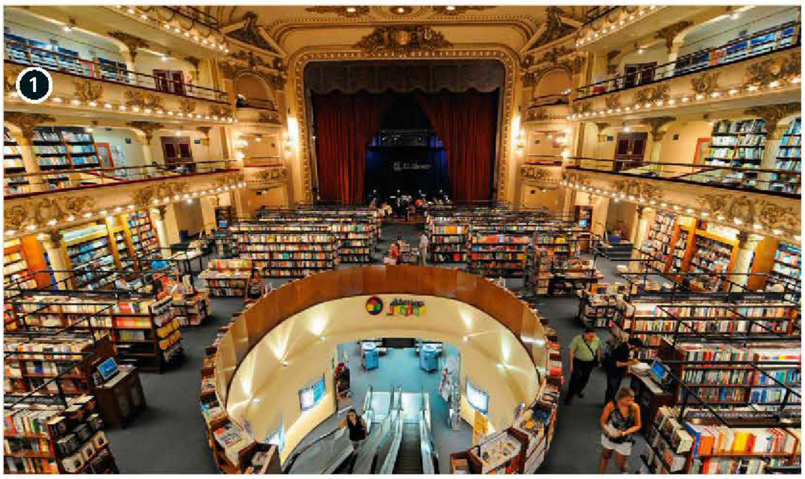
The city on the River Plate estuary is a colourful cultural melting pot, blending influences from successive waves of immigration. **JASON WILSON** picks five key historical sites to visit

❶ El Ateneo
Theatre of words

Buenos Aires has long been an important centre of publishing, considered the South American capital of books. Republicans exiled from Franco's Spain after the Civil War developed renowned publishing houses such as Losada and Sudamericana, supplying books to the whole Spanish-speaking world. Indeed, Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published first by Sudamericana in Buenos Aires in 1967.

Along Avenida Corrientes, famous bookshops including Gandhi, Losada and Hernández, as well as vast secondhand booksellers, underline how books and reading define the *porteño* (citizen of Buenos Aires).

Not all bookshops are created equal, though – and El Ateneo is something really extraordinary. This enormous store and publishing house spans several floors within a former cinema, the Grand Splendid, which opened in 1919 on Avenida Santa Fe. In that first incarnation, the building staged ballet and opera, and screened the first 'talkies' seen in the city. Transformed in 2000, with its gorgeous dome frescoes preserved, it now features a bar on the theatre stage – and of course shelves lined with tens of thousands of books.



Named by *National Geographic* as the "world's most beautiful bookstore", the enormous El Ateneo is housed in a former theatre and has space for tens of thousands of books

Visitors flock to the tomb of Eva Péron, the former first lady of Argentina, in the Recoleta Cemetery

❷ Recoleta Cemetery
City of the dead

Enveloped by the chic Recoleta *barrio* (district) downtown, the high entrance gates of this incredible necropolis open onto a miniature town of mausoleums where you can find the tombs of many of those who made the country. The Recoleta Cemetery is a veritable who's who of Argentine historical characters.

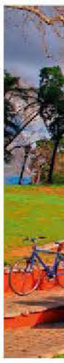
Look out for the mausoleum of Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, influential president from 1868 to 1874, who championed education and democracy. You won't be able to miss the resting place of Eva Péron in the Duarte Family mausoleum as it is typically festooned with flowers left by devotees of the beloved first lady. Aged just 33, she died in 1952, and was made famous internationally by the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Evita* after its premiere in 1978.

Next door to the Recoleta Cemetery is the all-white Pilar Church, dating to the early 18th century. Incorporating alabaster windows and tiles imported from France, the church was originally part of a monastery that gave its name to the cemetery.

❸ Parque Lezama
First foundation

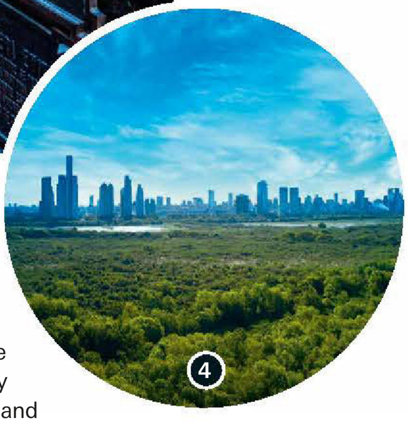
This lively park sits on the raised riverbank of the Paraná – or it did, back when the river lapped the shore here. You now look down onto traffic-clogged avenues below, the water pushed way back to the east by the growing city. A large bronze statue of conquistador Pedro de Mendoza marks the spot where he reputedly landed on 2 February 1536, establishing the fortified settlement he named Nuestra Señora Santa María del Buen Aire (Our Lady Saint Mary of the Good Air) – hence Buenos Aires. That first attempt soon failed, though, and the city was founded anew in 1580, by Juan de Garay – and this time it stuck.

The park is in the city's oldest *barrio* of San Telmo; the site was beautified in the 19th century. Today, you can wander the leafy grounds studded with sculptures, watch elderly men playing chess and people sucking *mate* (herbal tea) from gourds or mucking around in a phoney Greek theatre.



ALAMY

Sculptures form part of the impressive collection of art and artefacts in the Museo Larreta



An expansive ecological reserve has become the 'green lungs' of Buenos Aires

④ Parque Natural y Zona de Reserva Ecologica

Nature resurgent

This 350-hectare park south of the city centre emerged from silted land near the port to become the green lungs of the city, shimmering with lagoons, shaded by alders and home to many species of bird and animals. For over four decades from 1918 this was the municipal bathing area but as the water quality deteriorated, it fell out of favour and was abandoned, gradually becoming littered with debris. Then nature fought back, with vegetation growing across the site, and in 1986 it was declared a natural park and ecological reserve.

Near the entrance stands a modernist building once called the Cervecería Munich, a popular brewery; nearby stretches a *costanera* (river walk) beneath tall tipa trees. Roam its long paths on weekends alongside the many *porteños* who come to enjoy its lush serenity and look out for Fuente de Las Nereidas (Fountain of the Mermaids) with its naked Venus that shocked the city in 1903.

The amphitheatre in the lively Parque Lezama, which was built on the banks of the river Paraná

⑤ Museo Larreta

Memories of a melting pot

This museum – to give its full name, the Museo de Arte Español Enrique Larreta (Enrique Larreta Museum of Spanish Art) – is a reminder of the Spanish tradition in the city's immigration melting pot. Larreta was a writer and diplomat who bequeathed his whitewashed home, built in 1886, and Andalucian garden in the Belgrano district to the city on his death in 1961.

Importantly, that bequest included his impressive collection of art and artefacts now displayed in the Spanish-style mansion, including furniture, ceramics, books, weapons and an altar dating from 1503. You can visit his writing room, which was a monk's cell, and roam the glorious gardens featuring native trees such as the *ombú*, the sole tree of the pampas, alive with birds, flowers and the music of fountains. H

Jason Wilson is professor emeritus at University College London, and author of *Buenos Aires* (Reaktion, 2014). He was speaking to travel writer Paul Bloomfield, host of our podcast series *History's Greatest Cities*

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PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

1 Hippolytus, say, who headed a group opposed to the third-century pontificate of Callixtus I (8)

5 ____ Russel Wallace formulated his theory of evolution by natural selection independently of, and before publication by, Darwin (6)

10 Flanders city where the treaty ending the war between Britain and the US was signed in 1814 (5)

11 A member of a privileged class in early Rome (9)

12 The first caliph of Islam after the Prophet Muhammad (3,4)

13 In 1912, one of these caused an infamous maritime disaster (7)

14 Former name of the southern African country that unilaterally declared independence from Britain in 1965 (8)

16/30 across Medieval judicial practice, often using fire or water, to determine a person's guilt or innocence (5,2,6)

19 Joe ____, anarchic writer of black comedies, killed by his lover in 1967 (5)

20 ____ Palace, commonly used name for the erstwhile home of Mary, Queen of Scots (8)

23 Saint Edmund ____, Catholic martyr falsely accused of treason against Elizabeth I and hanged, drawn and quartered in 1581 (7)

25 Term, now often used humorously, for a member of a town's wealthy bourgoisie (7)

27 Term for a 17th-century pirate operating in the Caribbean, such as Sir Henry Morgan (9)

28 Bonnie Prince Charlie's advance on London in 1745 got no further south than this city (5)

29 Family name of paleoanthropologists whose 1950s finds in Africa added greatly to the understanding of human evolution (6)

30 See 16 across

Down

1 ____ Sea, the cradle of ancient civilisations such as the Minoan and Mycenaean (6)

2 Siege machine used for launching projectiles in ancient and medieval times (9)

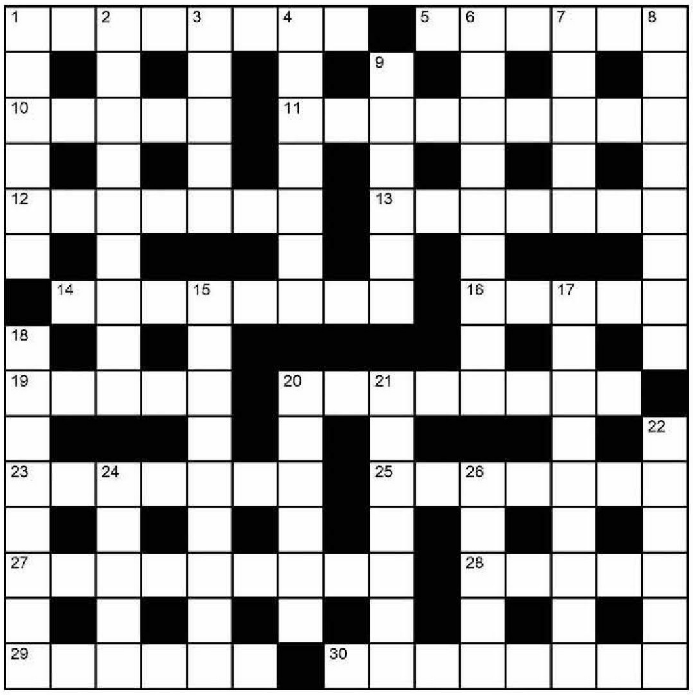
3 Modern name of the Indian city known as Pataliputra in ancient times and Azimabad during the Mughal period (5)

4 Writing surface associated particularly with ancient Egypt (7)

6 Robert Dudley, Earl of ____, favourite of Elizabeth I (9)

7 Defeat at the Teutoburg Forest limited the north-east expansion of the Roman empire to this river (5)

Which city marked the southernmost point of Bonnie Prince Charlie's advance on London in 1745? *(28 across)*



What was the writing surface famously used by Egyptian scribes? *(4 down)*

8 Anglo-Saxon tax to buy off Nordic invaders (8)

9 Fifth-century king of the Huns, initially ruling jointly with his brother, Bleda (6)

15 Perthshire location linked to Macbeth's defeat by Siward and Malcolm Canmore (9)

17 A once-popular archaic term for a steam locomotive (4,5)

18 The 'Royal Oak' in which Charles II hid from parliamentarians was located near ____ House, Shropshire (8)

20 Celebrated 18th-century German composer who became a British subject (6)

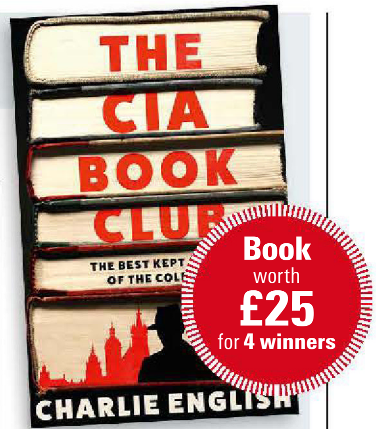
21 The ____ Bell, said (wrongly) to have been rung on 4 July 1776 to celebrate the adoption of the Declaration of Independence (7)

22 Earls and, later, Dukes of ____ have been the titular heads of the Clan Campbell since the Middle Ages (6)

24 Sacred city of Saudi Arabia, once known by the ancient name Macoraba (5)

26 Physicist Watson-Watt helped develop this vital Battle of Britain defence system (5)

Compiled by **Eddie James**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● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to ***BBC History Magazine*, June 2025 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA** or email them to ***June2025@historycomps.co.uk*** by 5pm on 11 June 2025. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the August 2025 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at *https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy* ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry.
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Solution to our April 2025 crossword

Across 1 Majuba 4 Ukraine 10 Lancaster 11 Curie 12 Radar 13 Grapeshot 14 Gemini 16 Nippur 19/20 Bayard Rustin 22 Richard II 25 Cecil 26 Iliad 27 Foederati 28 Darnley 29 Enosis
Down 1 Malory 2 Jane Digby 3 Blair 6 Alchemist 7/5 North Korea 8 Stigand 9 Reuter 15 Mary Arden 17 Punic Wars 18 Lucifer 19 Borgia 21 Plains 23 China 24 Defoe 25 Creon

Four winners of *Motherland*:
Christine Greenwood, Rochdale; Cynthia Brown, Leicester; Elizabeth Cadwallader, Scunthorpe; Ron Hancock, Weymouth

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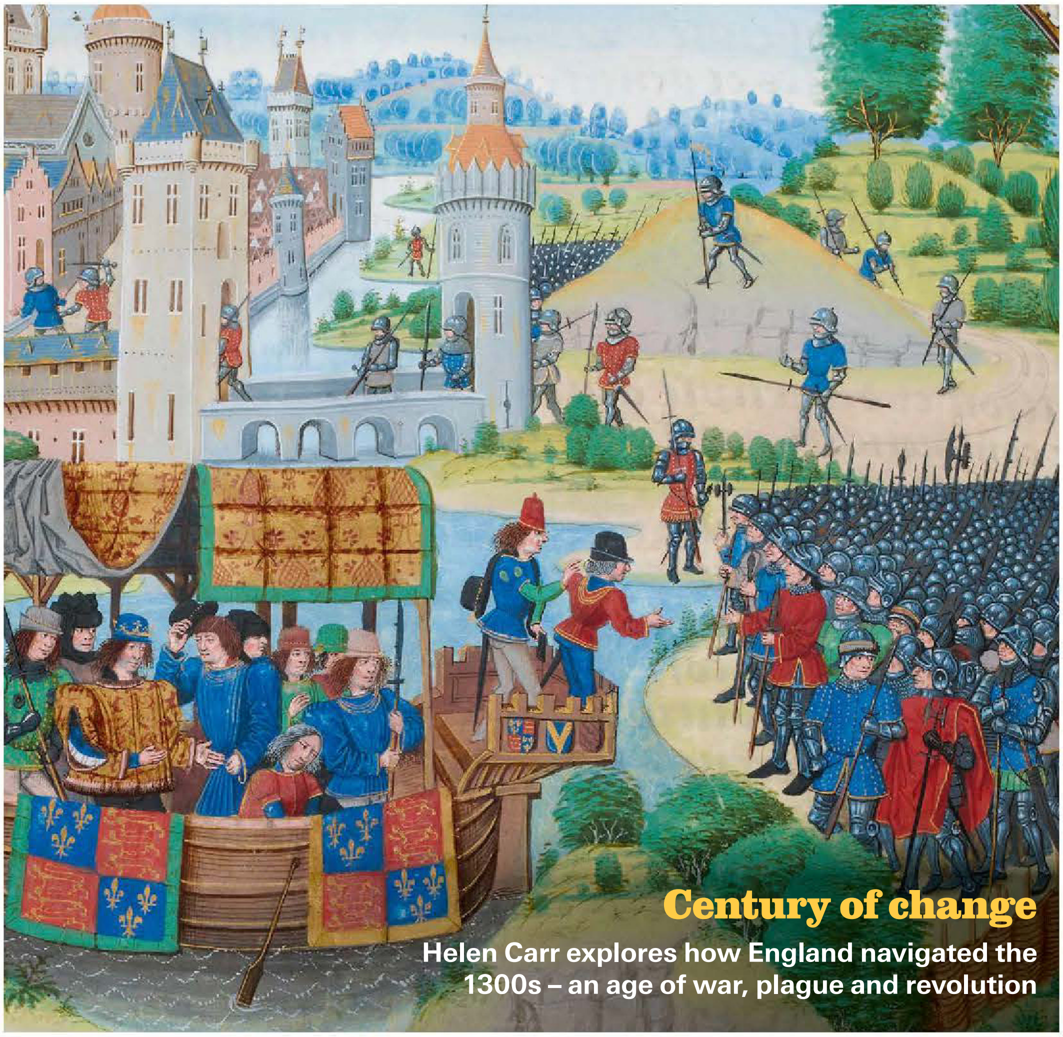

Century of change

Helen Carr explores how England navigated the 1300s – an age of war, plague and revolution

Caesar's final revenge

Jessica Clarke describes how the Roman dictator's dramatic funeral turned the tide on his killers

Royal Observatory Greenwich

Snapshots in time

Louise Devoy picks out some key moments in the history of the Royal Observatory and GMT

The battle *against* Britain

Victoria Taylor examines the pivotal 1940 air campaign from the perspective of the Luftwaffe

Tudors in danger

Steven Gunn and Tomasz Gromelski reveal some of the biggest hazards of the 16th century

This used to be my playground

Jon Winder chronicles 150 years of children's outdoor play in Britain

GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

Writer and broadcaster ***Danny Robins*** *chooses*

Harry Price

1881–1948

Danny Robins presents *Uncanny*, exploring paranormal and supernatural phenomena, on BBC Sounds and BBC iPlayer. His live show, Uncanny: Fear of the Dark, will tour the UK from September. *dannyrobins.com*

Harry Price in 1929, with equipment to detect the movement of hands and feet during seances. "He made it his mission to unmask fake mediums as charlatans," says Danny Robins

IN PROFILE

Harry Price was a British ghost-hunter, psychic researcher and author who achieved fame through his investigations into paranormal phenomena and for exposing fraudulent mediums. Renowned for his investigation into Borley Rectory – "the most haunted house in England" – he died of a heart attack at his West Sussex home at the age of 67.

> Price pretty much invented the concept of the 'ghost-hunter', and much of what we associate with 'the paranormal' has its roots in his work and the image he cultivated

When did you first hear about Price? I was obsessed by ghosts from an early age. When I came across Price he was already something of a mythical figure, thanks to cases such as the Borley Rectory 'hauntings' that loomed large in my childhood.

What kind of man was he? He had a Walter Mitty quality: he was constantly fictionalising his life and pumping out fake versions of himself – partly, I think, because of his humble background [his father was a travelling salesman]. He lied about where he was born and grew up, and faked archaeological finds and 'artefacts' that he'd knocked up in his shed.

What made Price a hero? I think one should use that word cautiously when talking about Harry, but, for all his flaws, he turned the paranormal into something mainstream and fun, and brought science to the study of the subject. He pretty much invented the concept of the 'ghost-hunter', and much of what we associate with 'the paranormal' has its roots in his work and the image he cultivated. He made psychic phenomena into news, and became a tabloid figure in what I think of as the golden age of ghost-hunting. Moreover, alongside Harry Houdini, he made it his mission to unmask fake mediums – the rock stars of the day, making huge money – as charlatans and tricksters.

What was his finest hour? First, exposing fake mediums who preyed on people's grief. Second, his detective-style investigations into paranormal occurrences, in particular at the Borley Rectory – though plenty of people will tell you that Harry faked phenomena and dramatised events there. He was simultaneously a showman and a researcher, and sometimes the showman won out.

Is there anything you don't particularly admire about him? The duplicitousness and slightly free approach to the truth he brought to the study of the paranormal. But I think his admirable qualities outweigh his less-admirable ones. Incidentally, he was also one of the founders of what became the British Film Institute.

Can you see any parallels between his life and yours? Like him, I believe that we need to listen to those people who've had ghostly encounters, and try to make sense of their experiences.

What would you ask him if you could meet his ghost? That would be wonderful – and would prove that we were both on the right track! I'd like to know if he regretted those occasions when he fluffed the truth and over-dramatised moments in his investigations. The truth should be enough. H

Danny Robins was talking to York Membery

In the BBC Radio 4 series **Great Lives**, guests discuss inspirational figures: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxsb*

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